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# THE YELLOW HOLLY

BY  
**FERGUS HUME**

AUTHOR OF

“THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB,” “THE RAINBOW FEATHER,”

“A COIN OF EDWARD VII.,” “THE PAGAN’S CUT,”

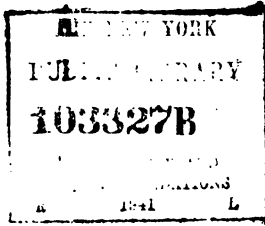
“CLAUDE DUVAL OF NINETY-FIVE,”

ETC.



G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

1903



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*Issued October 1, 1903*

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Lola pulled a white packet from her breast and ran with it to the fire. George shot past her, snatched them out before they could catch alight, and thrust them into his pocket.—(Page 296.)

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**THE YELLOW HOLLY**



## CHAPTER I

### "MRS JERSEY RECEIVES"

**S**HE did not put the sacramental phrase on her cards, as no invitations were sent out. These were delivered verbally by boarders desirous of seeing their friends present on Friday evening. Mrs Jersey dignified her gatherings with the name of "At Homes," but in truth the term was too majestic for the very mild entertainment she provided weekly.

It was really a scratch party of nobodies, and they assembled as usual in the drawing-room on this especial evening, to play and not to work. Mrs Taine laid aside her eternal knitting; Miss Bull dispensed with her game of "Patience"; Mr Granger sang his one song of the early Victorian Epoch—sometimes twice when singers were scarce; and Mr Harmer wore his antiquated dress-suit. On these festive occasions it was tacitly understood that all were to be more or less "dressy," as Mrs Jersey put it, and her appearance in "the diamonds" signaled the need of unusual adornment. These jewels were the smallest and most inferior of stones; but diamonds they undeniably were, and the boarders alluded to them as they would have done to the Kohinoor.

In her black silk gown, her lace cap, and "the diamonds" Mrs Jersey looked—so they assured her—quite the lady.

Was she a lady? No one ever asked that leading

question, as it would have provoked an untruth or a most unpleasant reply. She admitted in expansive moments to having seen "better days," but what her actual past had been—and from her looks she had one—none ever discovered. The usual story, produced by an extra glass of negus, varied so greatly in the telling that the most innocent boarder doubted. But Mrs Jersey was always treated with respect, and the boarders called her "Madame" in quite a French way. Why they should do so, no one ever knew, and Mrs Jersey herself could not have explained. But the term had become traditional, and in that conservative mansion tradition was all-powerful.

Few friends presented themselves on this particular Friday evening, for it was extremely foggy, and none of them could afford cabs. Even those who patronized the nearest bus line, had some distance to walk before they knocked at the Jersey door, and thus ran a chance of losing their way. Either in light or darkness the house was hard to find, for it occupied the corner of a particularly private square far removed from the Oxford Street traffic. As a kind of haven or back-water, it received into its peace those who found the current of the River of Life running too strong. Decayed ladies, disappointed spinsters, superannuated clerks, retired army officers, bankrupt dreamers—these were the derelicts which had drifted hither. Mrs Jersey called these social and commercial failures "paying guests," which flattered their pride and cost nothing. She was something of a humbug, and always ready with the small change of politeness.

It was quite an asylum for old age. None of the guests were under fifty, save a newcomer who had arrived the previous week, and they wondered why he came amongst them. He was young, though

plain-looking; he was fashionably dressed, though stout, and he chatted a West-End jargon, curiously flippant when contrasted with their prim conversation. This was the first time he had been present at Madame's reception, and he was explaining his reasons for coming to Bloomsbury. Mrs Jersey introduced him as “Leonard Train, the distinguished novelist,” although he had published only one book at his own cost, and even that production was unknown to the boarders. They read *Thackeray* and his contemporaries, and manifested a proper scorn for the up-to-date novelist and his analytical methods.

Mr Train, with a complacency which showed that he entertained the highest opinion of his own powers, stood on the hearth-rug, and delivered himself of his errand to Bloomsbury.

“Fashionable novelists,” said he, in a still, small voice, which contrasted curiously with his massive proportions, “have overdone the business of society and epigrams. We must revert to the Dickens style. I have therefore taken up my residence here for a brief period to study Old-World types.” Here he looked round with a beaming smile. “I am glad to find so rich a field to glean.”

This doubtful compliment provoked weak smiles. The boarders did not wish to be rude, but they felt it was impossible to approve of the young man. Not being sufficiently modern to court notoriety, one and all disliked the idea of being “put in a book.” Mrs Taine, conscious of her weak grammar, looked uneasily at Miss Bull, who smiled grimly and then glared at Train. Granger drew himself up and pulled his gray mustache; he was the buck of the establishment, and Harmer nodded, saying, “Well, well!” his usual remark when he did not understand what was going on. Only Madame spoke.



Train had taken a sitting-room as well as a bedroom, therefore he must be rich, and as he had not haggled over terms it was necessary that he should be flattered. Mrs Jersey saw a chance of making money out of him.

"How delightful," she said in her motherly manner; "I hope you will say nice things about us, Mr Train."

"I shall tell the truth, Madame. The truth does not flatter."

Mrs Jersey became still more motherly and paid a compliment. "That depends, Mr Train. If the truth were spoken about you, for instance."

It was really a very nice compliment; but Miss Bull, with malice aforethought, spoilt it in the utterance by laughing pointedly. Train, who had already set his face for a smile, grew red, and Madame darted a look at Miss Bull quite out of keeping with her motherly manner. More than this, she spoke her mind. "I hope, Mr Train, that you will speak the whole truth of *some* of us."

Miss Bull shrugged her thin shoulders, and in direct contradiction to the traditions of the evening produced her pack of cards. She played a complicated game called "The Demon," and never went to bed until she had achieved success at least thrice. Even when driven from the drawing-room she would finish the game in her bedroom, and sometime sat up half the night when her luck was bad. To abstain on this society evening always annoyed her, and since Madame had been rude Miss Bull seized the opportunity to show her indifference and enjoy, by doing so, her favorite pastime. She was a small, thin, dry old maid, with a pallid face and bright black eyes. Her mouth was hard, and she smiled treacherously. No one liked her save Margery, the niece of Mrs Jersey. But Margery

supposed to be queer, so her approval of Miss Bull mattered little.

“Perhaps Mr Granger will oblige us with a song,” suggested Madame, smoothing her face, but still inwardly furious.

Mr Granger, who had been waiting for this moment, was only too happy. He knew but one song, and had sung it dozens of times in that very room. It was natural to suppose that he knew it by heart. All the same he produced his music, and read the words as he sang. Margery played his accompaniment without looking at the notes. She was as familiar with them as she was with the moment when Mr Granger’s voice would crack. This night he cracked as usual, apologized as usual, and his hearers accepted the apology as usual, so it was all very pleasant. “‘The Death of Nelson,’” said Granger, “is a difficult song to sing when the singer is not in voice. The fog, you know—”

“Quite so,” murmured Train, politely. “Do you know ‘Will-o-the-Wisp,’ Mr Granger?”

Mr Granger did not, much to his regret, and Mr Harmer joined in the conversation. “Now there’s a song,” said he—“‘Will-o-the-Wisp.’ I knew a man who could bring the roof down with that song. Such lungs!”

“I don’t love that loud shouting, myself,” said Mrs Taine in her fat voice. “Give me something soft and low, like ‘My Pretty Jane!’”

“Ah! you should have heard Sims Reeves sing it,” said Harmer.

“I have heard him,” said Leonard, to whom the remark was addressed.

Harmer was annoyed. “Perhaps you have heard Grisi and Mario also?”

“No, sir. But my grandfather did.”

“Probably,” said Harmer, glancing at his fresh

face and bald head in a near mirror. "I was a mere child myself when I heard them. Do you know much about music, Mr Train?"

"I have heard it a good deal talked about," replied Leonard, with the air of saying something clever.

"And great rubbish they talk," put in Mrs Taine, smoothing one hand over the other. "In my young days we talked of Wagner and Weber. Now it is all Vagner and Veber—such affectation."

"Ah! manners are not what they used to be," sighed another old lady, who prided herself on her straight back and clear eyesight.

"Nor singers," said Mr Granger. "There are no voices nowadays, none."

"What about Calve and Melba?" asked Leonard.

"Those are foreigners," said Mr Granger, getting out of the difficulty. "I speak of our native talent, sir."

"Melba comes from Australia."

"She is not English—a foreigner, I tell you. Don't talk to me, sir."

Mr Granger was becoming restive at being thus contradicted, and privately thought Leonard an impertinent young man. Madame, seeing that the old gentleman was ruffled, hastily intervened. "If Mrs Taine will play us the 'Canary Bird Quadrilles' how pleased we shall be."

Mrs Taine obliged, and Harmer [hung over the piano, quite enraptured at these airs which recalled his hot youth. Afterward he begged for the "Mabel Waltz." Meantime Margery was sitting in the corner with Miss Bull, and both were engrossed with "Patience." Madame, under cover of the music, talked with Train.

"You mustn't mind the guests," she said; "they are old and require to be humored."

“It’s most amusing, Madame. I shall stop here three weeks to pick up types.”

“Oh! you must stay longer than that,” said Madame, smiling and patting his hand, still in a motherly way; “now that you have found us out, we cannot lose you. By the way—” here Mrs Jersey’s eyes became very searching—“how did you find us out?”

“It was a friend of mine, Madame. He knew that I wanted to get into the Dickens world, and suggested this house. I am not disappointed—oh, not at all—” and Leonard glanced at Margery, who was fat, dull and stupid in her looks. She certainly resembled one of Dickens’s characters, but he could not recollect which at the moment.

“Do I know the gentleman?” asked Madame, who seemed anxious.

“I don’t think so. But he is coming to see me to-night.”

“You must ask him in here and introduce him. I should like to thank him for having recommended my house.”

“We were going to have a conversation in my room,” said Train, dubiously; “he’s such a shy fellow that I don’t think he’ll come in.”

“Oh! but he must; I love young people.” Madame looked round and shrugged. “It is rather dreary here at times, Mr Train.”

“I can quite believe that,” replied Leonard, who already was beginning to find the Dickens types rather boring. “Who is that tall old man with the long hair?”

“Hush! He may hear you. His name is Rasper. A great inventor, a most distinguished man.”

“What has he invented?”

“Oh, all sorts of things,” replied Mrs Jersey, vaguely. “His name is quite a household word in

Clapham. See, he's inventing something now." Mr Rasper, who had rather a haggard appearance, as though he used his brains too much, was glooming over the back of an envelope and the stump of a pencil. He frowned as he chewed this latter, and seemed bent upon working out an abstruse problem. "But it will really will not do, Mr Train," said Madame, shaking her head till "the diamonds" twinkled; "this is our evening of relaxation. But Miss Bull, against all precedent, is playing 'Patience,' and here is Mr Rasper inventing." She rose to interrupt Mr Rasper, but remained to ask Leonard if his friend was stopping the night.

"He will if he comes at all," replied Leonard, looking at his watch; "but if the fog is very thick I don't know if he'll turn up. It is now nine o'clock."

"We usually disperse at eleven," said Madame, "but on this night I must break up at ten, as I have—" she hesitated—"I have business to do."

"I won't trouble you, Madame," said Train; "my friend and I can have supper in my room."

"That's just it," said Madame, and her voice became rather hard. "I beg, Mr Train, that you and your friend will not sit up late."

"Why not? We both wish to smoke and talk."

"You can do that in the daytime, Mr Train. But my house is most respectable, and I hope you will be in bed before eleven."

Leonard would have protested, as he objected to this sort of maternal government, but Mrs Jersey rustled away, and he was left to make the best of it. Before he could collect his wits a message came that he was wanted. "By Jove! it's George," he said and hurried out of the room. Mrs Jersey overheard the name.

"I suppose his friend is called George," she

thought, and frowned. Her recollections of that name were not pleasant. However, she thought no more about the matter, but rebuked Mr Rasper for his inattention to the “Mabel Waltz.” “It is so sweet of Mrs Taine to play it.”

“I beg pardon—beg pardon,” stuttered Rasper, putting away his envelope and looking up with a dreamy eye. “I was inventing a new bootjack. I hope to make my fortune out of it.”

Madame smiled pityingly. She had heard that prophecy before, but poor Rasper’s inventions had never succeeded in getting him the house in Park Lane he was always dreaming about. But she patted his shoulder and then sailed across to Miss Bull. “The music doesn’t please you, Miss Bull,” she said in rather an acid tone.

“It’s very nice,” replied the old maid, dealing the cards, “but I have heard the ‘Mabel Waltz’ before.”

“You may not have the chance of hearing it again,” said Madame.

Miss Bull shrugged her shoulders to signify that it did not matter.

“I suppose that means Mrs Taine is about to leave us,” she said.

“There may be changes in the establishment soon, Miss Bull.”

“It’s a world of change,” replied Miss Bull, in her sharp voice. “Margery, was that a heart?”

Margery pointed a fat finger to the card in question, and Miss Bull muttered something about her eyesight getting worse. Madame knew that this was just done to annoy her, as Miss Bull’s sight was excellent. To revenge herself she took Margery away. “Go and tell the servants to send up the negus and sandwiches,” she said sharply.

Margery rose heavily. She was a huge girl of twenty years of age, and apparently very stupid.

Why sharp little Miss Bull, who loved no one, had taken to her no one knew; but the two were inseparable. Seeing this, Madame usually kept Margery hard at work in other quarters so as to part her from the old maid. But with the cunning of an animal—and Margery was very much of that type—the girl managed to see a great deal of her one friend. Madame had an idea of the reason for this, but at the present moment did not think it was necessary to interfere. She was quite capable of crushing Miss Bull when the need arose. Meantime she vented her temper by sending Margery away. The girl departed with a scowl and an angry look at her aunt. But Miss Bull never raised her eyes, though she was well aware of what was going on.

Madame was not to be beaten. "I tell you what, dear Miss Bull," she said, smiling graciously, "since you have broken through our rule, and have produced the cards, you shall tell all our fortunes."

"Yours?" asked Miss Bull, looking up for the first time.

Madame shook her head. "I know mine. Tell Mr Rasper if his invention will succeed. Or, perhaps, Mr Granger?"

"I am at Miss Bull's service," said the polite old gentleman, bowing.

Miss Bull swept the cards into a heap. "I'm quite willing," she said in a voice almost pleasant for her. "Anything to oblige dear Madame."

Mrs Jersey smiled still more graciously and sailed away to send Mr Harmer to the cards. But she wondered inwardly why Miss Bull had given way so suddenly. There was some reason for it, as Miss Bull never did anything without a reason. But Mrs Jersey kept her own counsel, and still continued to smile. She had quite made up her mind how to act.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, standing in

the middle of the drawing-room, “we must disperse to-night at ten. I have some business to attend to, so I request you will all retire at that hour. In the mean time, Miss Bull has kindly consented to tell your fortunes.”

It was extraordinary to see how those withered old people crowded round the table. Their several fates had long since been settled, so what they could expect the cards to tell them, save that they would one and all die soon, it is difficult to say. Yet so ineradicable is the wish to know the future in the human breast that they were as eager as youth to hear what would befall them. And Miss Bull, wholly unmoved by their senile excitement, dealt the cards with the air of a sphinx.

Madame meantime retired to her throne, and saw that the servants arranged the tray properly. She had a gigantic chair, which was jokingly called her throne, and here she received strangers in quite a majestic way. It was a sort of Lady Blessington reception on a small scale, as Mr Harmer assured her, and, as he had been to Gore House in his youth, he knew what he was talking about. Knowing his courtly manners, and being greedy of compliments, Mrs Jersey always tried to make him say that she resembled Lady Blessington. But this Mr Harmer refused to do. Not that Mrs Jersey was bad-looking. She had a fresh-colored face, bright black eyes, and plenty of white hair like spun silk. Her figure was stout, but she yet retained a certain comeliness which showed that she must have been a handsome woman in her youth. Her manners were motherly, but she showed a stern face toward Margery, and did not treat the girl so kindly as she might have done. As a rule, she had great self-command, but sometimes gave way to paroxysms of passion, which were really terrifying. But Mar-



gery alone had been witness of these, and Mrs Jersey passed for a dear, gentle old lady.

"Mr Harmer is to be married," announced Mrs Taine, leaving the circle round the card-table; "how extraordinary!"

"So extraordinary that it can't possibly be true," said Mr Harmer, dryly; "unless Madame will accept me," he added, bowing.

"I should recommend Miss Bull," replied Madame very sweetly, but with a venomous note in her voice. She might as well have thought to rouse the dead, for Miss Bull paid not the slightest attention. In many ways the self-composed old maid was a match for Madame.

At this moment Train entered, and after him came a tall young man, fair-haired and stalwart. He was handsome, but seemed to be ill at ease, and pulled his yellow mustache nervously as Train led him to the throne.

"This is my friend," said Leonard, presenting him. "He just managed to get here, for the fog is so thick——"

Here he was interrupted. "Madame!" cried Mrs Taine, "what is the matter? Mr Harmer, the water—wine—quick."

There was need of it. Mrs Jersey had fallen back on the throne with a white face and twitching lips. She appeared as though about to faint, but restraining herself with a powerful effort she waved her hand to intimate that she needed nothing. At the same time her eyes were fastened, not so much on the face of the stranger as on a piece of yellow holly he wore in his coat. "I am perfectly well," said Mrs Jersey. "This is only one of my turns. I am glad to see you, Mr——"

"Brendon," said the stranger, who seemed astonished at this reception.

“George Brendon,” interpolated Train, who was alive with curiosity; “have you seen him before, Madame?”

Mrs Jersey laughed artificially. “Certainly not,” she replied calmly, “and yours is not a face I should forget, Mr—Brendon.”

She uttered the name with a certain amount of hesitation as though she was not sure it was the right one. George nodded.

“My name is Brendon,” he said rather unnecessarily, and Mrs Jersey nodded in her most gracious manner.

“I bid you welcome, sir; any friend of Mr Train’s is also my friend. If there is anything to amuse you here?” She waved her hand. “We are simple people. Fortune-telling—a little music, and the company of my guests. Mrs Taine, Mr Harmer!” She introduced them, but every now and then her eyes were on the yellow holly. Brendon remarked it.

“You are noticing my flower, Mrs Jersey,” he said. “It is rather rare.”

“Most extraordinary,” replied Mrs Jersey, coolly. “I have seen holly with red berries before, but this yellow——”

“There was a great bush of it in my father’s garden,” said Mr Harmer, “but I have not seen any for years.”

“Perhaps you would like it, Mrs Jersey,” said Brendon, taking it from his coat.

She hastily waved her hand. “No! no! I am too old for flowers. Keep it, Mr Brendon. It suits better with your youth,” she looked at his face keenly. “I have seen a face like yours before.”

Brendon laughed. “I am of a commonplace type, I fear,” he said.

“No; not so very common. Fair hair and dark eyes do not usually go together. Perhaps I have met your father?”

"Perhaps," replied George, phlegmatically.

"Or your mother," persisted Mrs Jersey.

"I dare say!" Then he turned the conversation. "What a delightful old house you have here!"

Mrs Jersey bit her lip on finding her inquiries thus baffled, but taking her cue expanded on the subject of the house. "It was a fashionable mansion in the time of the Georges," she said. "Some of the ceilings are wonderfully painted, and there are all kinds of queer rooms and cupboards and corners in it. And so quiet. I dare say," she went on, "this room was filled with beaux and belles in powder and patches. What a sight, Mr Brendon—what a sight! Will you have some negus? Port-wine negus, Mr Brendon."

She was evidently talking at random, and offered him a glass of negus with a trembling hand. Brendon, evidently more and more astonished at her manner, drank off the wine. He made few remarks, being a man who spoke little in general company. Train had long ago gone to hear Miss Bull tell fortunes, and, from the laughter, it was evident that his future was being prophesied.

"No! no!" cried Train, "I shall never marry. A literary man should keep himself away from the fascinations of female society."

"Do you agree with that, Mr Brendon?" asked Mrs Jersey, curiously.

He shook his head and laughed. "I am not a hermit, Mrs Jersey."

"Then Miss Bull must prophesy about your marriage. Come!"

At first Brendon was unwilling to go, but after some persuasion he submitted to be led to the table. Miss Bull was quite willing to do what was asked of her, and spread out the cards. Brendon waited beside Mrs Jersey with a most indifferent air. She was far more anxious to hear the fortune than he was.

“You are in trouble,” announced Miss Bull in a sepulchral tone, “and the trouble will grow worse. But in the end all will be well. She will aid you to get free and will bestow her hand on you.”

“She?” asked Brendon, looking puzzled.

Miss Bull did not raise her eyes. “The lady you are thinking of.”

Brendon was rather taken aback, but seeing Mrs Jersey’s curious look he crushed down his emotion. “At my age we are always thinking of ladies,” he said, laughing.

Train touched his arm. “It is——” he began, but Brendon frowned, and Leonard was quick enough to take the hint. Miss Bull went on telling the fortune. There were the usual dark and fair people, the widow, the journey, the money, and all the rest of the general events and happenings which are usually foretold. But there was always trouble, trouble, and again trouble. “But you will come out right in the end,” said Miss Bull. “Keep a brave heart.”

“I am sure Mr Brendon will do that,” said Madame, graciously.

While George bowed to the compliment, Miss Bull again shuffled the cards, and fastened her keen black eyes on Madame. “Will you have your fortune told?” she asked coldly.

“Oh, certainly!” said Mrs Jersey in a most gushing manner; “anything to amuse. But my fortune has been told so often, and has never come true—never,” and she sighed in an effective manner.

Miss Bull continued her mystic counting. She told Madame a lot of things about the house which were known to most present. Mrs Jersey laughed and sneered. Suddenly Miss Bull turned up a black card, “You will meet with a violent death,” she said, and every one shuddered.

## CHAPTER II

### BRENDON'S STORY

**I**F Miss Bull wished to make Madame uncomfortable she certainly succeeded. From being voluble, Mrs Jersey became silent, the fresh color died out of her face, and her lips moved nervously. Twice did she make an effort to overcome her emotion, but each time failed. Afterward she took a seat by the fire, and stared into the flames with an anxious look, as though she saw therein a fulfillment of the dismal prophecy. Her depression communicated itself to the rest of the company, and shortly before ten the friends took their departure. The idea of being alone seemed to cheer Mrs Jersey, and she accompanied her departing guests to the front door.

It was a comparatively thick fog, yet not so bad but that the visitors might hope to reach their homes. For some time Mrs Jersey stood in the doorway at the top of the steps, and shook hands with those who were going. The boarders, who were old and chilly, were too wise to venture outside on such a dreary night, so Mrs Jersey had the doorstep all to herself. "If you lose your ways," she called out to the visitors, "come back. You can tell the house by the red light." She pointed to the fanlight of crimson glass behind which gas was burning. "I will keep that alight for another hour."

The voices of thanks came back muffled by the fog, but Leonard and George waited to hear no

more. They walked upstairs to Train's sitting-room, which was on the first floor. The windows looked out on to a back garden, wherein grew a few scrubby trees, so that the prospect was not cheering. But on this night the faded crimson curtains were drawn, the fire was lighted, and a round table in the middle of the apartment was spread for supper. On one side a door led to Leonard's bedroom, on the other side was the room wherein George was to sleep. As the fire-light played on the old-fashioned furniture and on the mellow colors of curtains and carpet, Leonard rubbed his hands. "It is rather quaint," he said cheerfully, and lighted the lamp.

"Not such a palace as your diggings in Duke Street," said Brendon, stretching his long legs on the chintz-covered sofa.

"One must suffer in the cause of art," said Train, putting the shade on the lamp. "I am picking up excellent types here. What do you think?"

"There's plenty of material," growled Brendon, getting out his pipe.

"Don't smoke yet, George," interposed Train, glancing at the clock. "We must have supper first. After that, we can smoke till eleven, and then we must go to bed."

"You keep early hours here, Leonard."

"I don't. Mrs Jersey asked me particularly to be in bed at eleven."

"Why?" Brendon started, and looked hard at his friend.

"I don't know, but she did."

"Is it an understood thing that you retire at that hour?"

Train shook his head and drew in his chair. "By no means. I have sat up till two before now. But on this night Mrs Jersey wants the house to be con-

sidered respectable, and therefore asked me to retire early. Perhaps it's on account of you, old man." Here he smiled in an amused manner. "She hopes to get you as a boarder."

"I wouldn't come here for the world," retorted Brendon, with quite unnecessary violence.

"Why not? Have some tongue!"

"Thanks," responded George, passing his plate. "Because I don't like the house, and I don't care for Mrs Jersey."

"Why did you advise me to come here, then?" asked Train, pouring out a glass of claret.

"Well, you wanted something in the style of Dickens, and this was the only place I knew."

"How did you know about it?"

George deliberated for a moment, and then fastened his eyes on his plate. "I lived here once," he said in a low voice.

"Dear me," gasped Train, "what an extraordinary thing."

"Why so? One must live somewhere."

"But you didn't like Mrs Jersey."

"She was not here then."

"Who was here?"

"My grandfather on the mother's side. That's fifteen years ago."

Leonard looked at the handsome, moody face of his friend, musingly. "I never knew you had a grandfather," he said at last.

"Do you know anything at all about me?" asked Brendon.

"No. Now I come to think of it, I don't. I met you three years ago at Mrs Ward's house, and we have been friends ever since."

"Acquaintances, rather. Men are not friends until they become confidential with one another. Well, Train," George pushed back his chair and wiped

his mouth, "to-night I intend to turn you from a mere acquaintance into a friend."

"I shall be delighted," said Train, rather bewildered. "Won't you have more supper?"

Brendon shook his head, lighted his pipe, and again stretched himself on the sofa. Train, being curious to know what he had to say, was on the point of joining him. But he was yet hungry, so could not bring himself to leave the table. He therefore continued his supper, and, as Brendon seemed disinclined to talk, held his peace.

Train's parents were dead, and had left him a snug little income of five thousand a year. Not being very strong-minded, and being more than a trifle conceited as to his literary abilities, his money speedily attracted round him a number of needy hangers-on, who flattered him to the top of his bent. They praised him to his face, sneered at him behind his back; ate his meat, borrowed his money, and kept him in a fools' paradise regarding human nature. Poor Leonard thought that all women were angels, and all men good fellows with a harmless tendency to borrow. Such a Simple Simon could not but be the prey of every scoundrel in London, and it said much for his moral nature that he touched all this pitch without being defiled. He was called a fool by those he fed, but none could call him a rogue.

It was this simplicity which inspired Brendon with a pitying friendship; and Brendon had done much to save him from the harpies who preyed on this innocent. In several cases he had opened Train's eyes, at the cost of quarreling with those who lost by the opening. But George was well able to hold his own, and none could say that he benefited pecuniarily by the trust and confidence which Leonard reposed in him. To avert all suspicion of this



sort he had refused to become Train's secretary and companion at an excellent salary. Brendon was poor and wanted that salary; but he valued his independence, and so preferred to fight for his own hand. However, he continued his services to Leonard as a kind of unofficial mentor.

Now that Train came to think of it, Brendon was rather a mysterious person. He lived by writing articles for the papers, and was always well dressed. His rooms were in Kensington, and he seemed to know many people whom he did not cultivate. Train would have given his ears to enter the houses at which Brendon was a welcome guest. But for the most part George preferred to live alone with his pipe and his books. He was writing a novel, and hoped to make a successful career as a literary man. But as he was barely thirty years of age, and had been settled only five years in London, his scheme of life was rather in embryo. He appeared to have some secret trouble, but what it was Train never knew, as Brendon was a particularly reticent man. Why he should propose to be frank on this especial night Leonard could not understand. After supper he put the question to him.

"Well," said Brendon, without moving or taking his eyes from the fire, "it's this way, Train. I know you are a kind-hearted man, and although you talk very freely about your own affairs, yet I know you can keep the secret of a friend."

"You can depend upon that, George. Anything you tell me will never be repeated."

Brendon nodded his thanks. "Also," he continued, "I wish you to lend me three hundred pounds."

"A thousand if you will."

"Three hundred will be sufficient. I'll repay you when I come into my property."

Train opened his eyes. "Are you coming into money?" he asked.

"That I can't say. It all depends! Do you know why I suggested this house to you, Leonard?" he asked suddenly.

"To help me in my literary work."

"That was one reason certainly, but I had another and more selfish one, connected—" George sat up to finish the sentence—"connected with Mrs Jersey," he said quietly.

This remark was so unexpected that Leonard did not know what to say for the moment. "I thought you did not know her," he gasped out.

"Nor do I."

"Does she know you?"

"Not as George Brendon, or as I am now."

"What do you mean?" Train was more puzzled than ever.

"It's a long story. I don't know that I can tell you the whole."

Train looked annoyed. "Trust me——"

"All in all, or not at all," finished Brendon; "quite so." He paused and drew hard at his pipe. "Since I want money I must trust you."

"Is it only for that reason that you consider me worthy of your confidence?" asked Leonard, much mortified.

George leaned forward and patted him on the knee. "No, old man. I wish you to help me also."

"In what way?"

"With Dorothy Ward," replied George, looking closely at his pipe.

"Was she in your mind to-night when that old maid was telling the cards?" asked Train, sitting up with a look of interest.

Brendon nodded. "But I do not wish you to mention her name. That was why——"

"I know. I was foolish. Well, she's a pretty girl, and as good as she is pretty."

"Which is marvelous," said Brendon, "considering the fashionable mother she has."

Train smiled. "Mrs Ward is certainly a leader of fashion."

"And as heartless as any woman I know," observed Brendon. He glanced affectionately at the yellow holly. "Dorothy gave me this to-night."

"Did you see her before you came here?"

"Yes. I went to afternoon tea. We—" Brendon examined his pipe again—"we understand one another," he said.

Leonard sprang to his feet. "My dear chap, I congratulate you."

"Thanks! but it's too early for congratulation as yet. Mrs Ward wants her daughter to make a good marriage. George Brendon will not be the husband of her choice, but Lord Derrington!"

"Does she want her daughter to marry that old thing?"

"You don't understand, Leonard. I mean that if I become Lord Derrington when the old man dies Mrs Ward will consent."

Train sat down helplessly and stared. "I don't understand," he said.

"I'll put the thing in a nutshell," explained Brendon. "Lord Derrington is my grandfather."

"Your—but he never lived here?"

"No. The grandfather who lived here, and with whom I stayed, was my mother's father. He was called Lockwood. Derrington is my father's father. Now do you understand?"

"Not quite! How can you become Lord Derrington when he has a grandson—that young rip Walter Vane!"

"Walter Vane is the son of my father's brother,

and my father was the elder and the heir to the title."

"Then, if Lord Derrington dies you become——"

"Exactly. But the difficulty is that I have to establish my birth."

Leonard jumped up and clutched his hair. "Here's a mystery," he said, staring at his friend. "What does it all mean?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you!"

Leonard resumed his seat and glanced at the clock. "We have a quarter of an hour," he said, "but I think we'll defy Mrs Jersey and sit up this night."

"No," said Brendon, hastily; "we may as well do what she wants. I wish to conciliate her. She is the only person who can help to prove my mother's marriage."

"Humph! I thought there was something queer about her. Who was she?"

"My mother's maid! But I had better tell you from the beginning."

Train sat down and produced a cigarette. "Go on," he said; "no, wait! I want to know before you begin why Mrs Jersey was so struck with that yellow holly?"

This time it was Brendon who looked puzzled. "I can't say, Leonard."

"Do you think she connected it with some disaster?" asked Train.

"From her looks, when she set eyes on it, I should think so!"

"Does Miss Ward know Mrs Jersey?"

"No. She knows nothing about her."

"And it was Miss Ward who gave you the yellow holly?"

"Yes. When I was at afternoon tea."

"Then I can't see why Mrs Jersey should have

made such a spectacle of herself," said Leonard, lighting his cigarette. "Tell your story."

"I'll do so as concisely as possible," said Brendon, staring into the fire. "My mother was the daughter of Anthony Lockwood, who was a teacher of singing, and lived here. She—I am talking of my mother—was very beautiful, and also became famous as a singer at concerts. The son of Lord Derrington, Percy Vane, saw her and loved her. He subsequently eloped with her. She died in Paris two years later, shortly after I was born."

"And you came to live here?"

"Not immediately. I was but an infant in arms, but my father would not part with me. He kept Mrs Jersey—she was my mother's maid, remember—as my nurse, and we went to Monte Carlo. I am afraid my poor father was a bit of a scamp. He was at all events a gambler, and lost all his money at the tables. He became poor, and his father, Lord Derrington, refused to help him."

"He was angry at the marriage, I suppose?"

"That's the point. Was there a marriage? But to make things clear I had better go on as I started. My father went to San Remo, and from that place he sent me home to my grandfather Lockwood."

"With Mrs Jersey?"

"No. By that time Mrs Jersey had left; I had another nurse, and it was she who took me to this house. My grandfather was delighted to have me, as he always insisted that there was a marriage. I grew up here, and went to school, afterward to college. My grandfather died, but there was just enough money to finish my education. The house was sold, and by a curious coincidence Mrs Jersey took it as a boarding establishment. Where she got the money I don't know. But I passed out of her life as a mere infant, and I don't suppose she thought

anything more about me. Perhaps she recognized me to-night from my likeness to my father, as she mentioned that she had seen my face before. But I can't say."

"What became of your father?"

"That is the tragic part of the story. He was murdered at a masked ball at San Remo. The assassin was never discovered, but it was supposed to be some passionate Italian lover. My grandfather Lockwood was so angry at the way in which his daughter had been treated that he never stood up for my rights. I would not do so, either, but that I love Miss Ward. Now, it is my intention to see Mrs Jersey to-morrow and get the truth out of her."

"What does she know?"

"She knows where the marriage was celebrated, and can prove that my birth is legitimate. That is why I came here, Leonard."

"Why did you not speak to her to-night?"

"I think it is better she should be in a quieter frame of mind," said Brendon. "She has never seen me since I was a small child, and my name of Brendon is quite unknown to her."

"Why do you call yourself Brendon?" asked Train.

George began to pace up and down the room. "Pride made me do that," he declared. "When my father was murdered at San Remo, Lord Derrington denied the marriage, and refused to do anything for me. My grandfather Lockwood gave me his own name, and I was called George Lockwood for many a long day. At the age of fifteen Mr Lockwood died, and then a note came to my guardian saying that Lord Derrington proposed to allow me a small income."

"For what reason?"

"I can't say. Perhaps it was remorse."

Train shook his head. "I have met Lord Derring-

ton, and if such an old Tartar feels remorse, then there is a chance that pigs may fly."

"That's an elegant illustration, Leonard," observed George, with a smile; "but to continue (as I see it is nearly eleven), even as a boy I felt the indignity put upon me. I refused, with the permission of my guardian, the offered sum, and continued at school. When I left to go to college I changed my name so that Lord Derrington should not have the chance of insulting me further or of knowing who I was. My guardian suggested Brendon, so as that was as good a name as another I took it. Hence Mrs Jersey can't possibly know me, or why I came to see her. She will be wiser in the morning," added Brendon grimly.

"But she evidently saw in you some likeness to your father."

"Evidently. From all I have heard Mrs Jersey was in love with my father, even though she was only a lady's maid. But I know very little about her. My business here is to learn.

"But why has she kept silent all these years?"

Brendon shrugged his shoulders. "She has had no inducement to speak out," he said; "that is why I wish you to lend me three hundred pounds, Leonard. She will require a bribe."

"And a larger one than that, George. A woman like Mrs Jersey would not part with such a secret for so small a sum."

"Oh, I can pay her what she demands when in possession of the estates. But at present she will want to see the color of my money."

Train stared into the fire meditating on this queer story, which was quite a romance. Then he saw an obstacle. "George," he said, "even if you prove that you are the heir you won't get any money. Lord Derrington is still living."

"Yes, and from all accounts he means to go on living like the truculent old tyrant he is. But the estates are entailed, and must come to me when he dies, and, of course, the title is mine, too, when he is done with it. If Mrs Jersey learns these facts, she will come to terms, on a promise of money when I inherit."

"Then you will speak to her in the morning?"

"Yes. She is the only person who can right me. But I mean to be the husband of Dorothy Ward, and my only chance to get round the mother is to prove my legitimacy."

"I don't think Miss Ward cares much for her mother."

"Who could?" asked Brendon, cynically. "She is a worthless little canary-bird. But I tell you, Leonard, that frivolous as Mrs Ward appears to be, she is a most determined woman, with an iron will. She will make her daughter do as she is bid, and will sell her to the highest bidder. As Lord Derrington's grandson and acknowledged heir, I have a good chance. As George Brendon—" he stopped as the clock struck eleven—"as George Brendon I am going to bed."

Train rose to light the candles which stood on a side-table, yawning as he did so. He was much interested in Brendon's story, but the telling of it had tired him. "I shall sleep like a top to-night."

"Well, get to bed. I'll put out the lamp," said George, and did so.

"No," said Leonard, taking a candlestick in either hand. "I'll see you to your virtuous couch," and he preceded him into the bedroom.

It was a quaint apartment, with heavy mahogany furniture and a Turkey carpet. Entering from the sitting-room, George saw that the bed was directly opposite the door. It's been moved since my time."



"What?" cried Leonard, setting down the candles, "is the furniture the same your grandfather had?"

"Yes. Mrs Jersey bought the house and its contents. They are old-fashioned enough in all conscience. Look at that ugly wardrobe." He pointed to one against the inner wall and opposite the window. "The mirror in that used to frighten me as a little chap. It looked so ghostly in the moonlight. Humph! it's years and years since I slept in my old bed," said Brendon, taking off his coat. "I should dream the dreams of childhood now that I am back again. But you needn't say anything of this, Leonard."

"Of course not," replied the other. "And you need not smash your yellow holly by leaving it in your coat all night. Put it in water."

"No." George stopped the too officious Leonard. Dorothy put it into my coat, and there it shall remain. The berries are firm and won't fall. I'll see to that. Hush!"

"What's the matter?" asked Train, startled.

For answer, Brendon quickly extinguished both candles, and pointed to the door of the sitting-room, which stood half open. "Not a word," he murmured to Train, grasping his wrist to enforce attention. "I heard a footstep."

The two men stood in the darkness, silent and with beating hearts. A glimmer of light came from the fire and struck across into the bedroom. Leonard listened with all his ears. He distinctly heard stealthy footsteps coming along the passage, which was on the other side of the wall against which stood the wardrobe. The footsteps paused at the sitting-room door. They heard this open, and scarcely dared to breathe. Some one entered the room, and waited for a moment or so, evidently listening. Then the door was opened and closed

again, and the footsteps died away. Even then Brendon stopped Leonard from lighting the candles.

"Go to bed in the dark," he said softly.

"Was it Mrs Jersey?" asked Leonard.

"Of course it was. She came to see if you were in bed."

"But why should she?"

"I can't say. There's something queer about that old woman. Get to bed, Leonard. You can light your candle in your own room. I shall not light mine."

Train was bursting with indignation. "But it's absurd to be treated like a couple of schoolboys," he said, taking his candlestick.

"There's more in it than that," said Brendon, pushing him to the door. "Get to bed, and make no noise. We can talk in the morning."

Train darted across the sitting-room, and retired. Brendon closed his door softly, and listened again. There was no return of the footsteps, so he slipped into bed without relighting the candle. The clock in the sitting-room chimed a quarter past eleven.

## CHAPTER III

### THE NEXT MORNING

“**F**OGS and smokes and chokes,” said the fat cook, her elbows on the table, and a saucer of tea at her lips. “I wish I were back in Essex, that I do.”

“The fogs come from there,” cried Jarvey, who was page-boy in the Jersey mansion, and knew more than was good for him. “If they drained them marshes, fogs wouldn’t come here. Old Rasper says so, and knows a lot, he does.”

“He don’t know Essex,” grunted the cook. “A lovely county——”

“For frogs,” sniggered Jarvey, devouring his slice of bread.

The housemaid joined in and declared for Devon, whence she came. The Swiss manservant talked of his native mountains, and was sneered at by the company generally as a foreigner. Jarvey was particularly insolent, and poor Fritz was reduced to swearing in his own language, whereupon they laughed the more. It was a most inspiring beginning to the day’s work.

The kitchen in the basement was a large stone apartment, and even on the brightest of days not very well lighted. On this particular morning the gas was burning, and was likely to continue alight during the day, as the fog was as thick as ever. The servants collected round the table were having an early cup of tea. To assist the progress of digestion they conversed as above, and gradually

drifted into talking of their mistress and of the boarders. Miss Bull in particular seemed to be disliked.

"She's a sly cat, with that white face of hers," said the cook. "Twice she said the soup was burnt. I never liked her."

"Madame don't, either," said Jarvey, ruffling his short hair. "They've been quarreling awful. I shouldn't wonder if Madame gave her notice."

"Ah! Miss Margery will have something to say to that," chimed in the housemaid; "she likes Miss Bull."

"'Cause Miss Bull makes much of her, and no one else does."

"Well, for my part," said the cook, "I'm always civil to Miss Bull, though she is a cat. If the mistress died, Miss Margery would govern the house, and Miss Bull governs her. I don't want to lose no good situation through bad manners."

"Madame ain't likely to die," said Jarvey; "she's as healthy as a stray dog, and as sharp. I don't care for old Miss Bull, or for stopping here, as I'm a-going to get a place as waiter at a club."

"Ach, leetle boy, you will be no vaiter," said Fritz.

"Shut your mouth, froggy," snapped Jarvey, and produced a cigarette.

"Don't you smoke here, you brat," shrieked the cook, and, snatching it from his mouth, flung it into the fire. "Here's Madame's tea. Take it to her sitting-room. She's sure to be up and waiting."

Jarvey showed fight at first, but as the cook had a strong arm he thought discretion the better part of valor, and went grumbling up the stairs. Mrs Jersey was an early riser, and usually had a cup of tea in her sitting-room at seven o'clock. After this refresher she gave audience to the cook, looked over

her tradesmen's books, and complained generally that the servants were not doing their duty. Madame was not at her best in the morning, and Jarvey went up most unwillingly. The housemaid should have gone, but when she could she sent Jarvey, and when he refused to go Fritz was dispatched to bear the brunt of Madame's anger. She usually scolded Fritz in French.

When the boy went the servants continued chatting and eating. It was just on seven, and they were reluctantly rising to begin their duties, when a crash was heard and then a clatter of boots. "There," cried the cook, "that brat's been and smashed the tray. Won't Madame give it to him? Mercy! mercy!"—her voice leaped an octave—"he's mad!"

This was because Jarvey, with his hair on end and his face perfectly white, tore into the kitchen. He raced round and round the table, his eyes starting from his head. The servants huddled together in fear, and the cook seized the toasting-fork. They all agreed with her that the page was mad. Suddenly Jarvey tumbled in a heap, and began to moan, with his face on the floor. "Oh! the blood—the blood!"

"What's he saying about blood?" asked the scared cook.

Jarvey leaped to his feet. "She's dead—she's murdered!" he shrieked. "I see her all covered with blood. Oh—mother—oh, I want my mother!" and down he dropped on the floor again, kicking and screaming.

The boy was scared out of his life, and Fritz laid hold of him, while the other servants, headed by the valiant cook, ran up the stairs and burst into Madame's sitting-room, which was on the ground floor, and no great distance from the front door.

The next moment they were out again, all shrieking murder and calling loudly for the police. The sleeping boarders took the alarm, and in the lightest of attire appeared on the stairs with white faces. The terrible word shrieked by a dozen voices through the silent house curdled the blood in their aged veins. What with the early hour, the fog, the gas, and the crying of the servants, it was like a nightmare.

An hour later the police were in the house, summoned by Miss Bull, who alone of the boarders retained her head. As Margery, who was next in command after her aunt, could not be brought to do anything, Miss Bull took charge. It was Miss Bull who first ventured into the sitting-room where Madame, huddled up in a chair drawn to the table, lay face downward in such a position as to reveal a gaping wound in her neck. And it was Miss Bull who sent the servants back to the kitchen, who closed the door of the death-chamber, and who told Jarvey to fetch the nearest policeman. Consequently it was Miss Bull whom the inspector addressed, as she seemed to be the sole person in authority. Mrs Taine retreated to her bedroom with a prayer-book, Mr Granger went for a walk in the fog, Margery sat in a stupor, her eyes dull and her slack mouth awry. The little old maid, from being a nonentity, became a person of first-class importance. She displayed perfect tact and self-control in dealing with the terrified old men and women, and no one would have given her credit for such generalship. But the hour had come for Miss Bull to assert herself, and she proved to be equal to the occasion.

“Now, then,” said the inspector, when he had posted his men and was alone with Miss Bull in the drawing-room, “what do you know of this?”

Miss Bull, her face white and drawn, her eyes sharper than ever, and her manner perfectly composed, shook her head. "I know absolutely nothing," she said in her monotonous voice. "Last night we had our usual reception, but it broke up at ten o'clock. Madame dismissed the guests at that hour, and stood in the doorway to do so. I retired to my bedroom with Madame's niece, and after a game of 'Patience' I went to bed."

"Does Mrs Jersey's niece sleep with you?"

"Margery? No! She sleeps in a room above. It was a few minutes to eleven when she left me. I was in bed shortly after the clock struck the hour. I am sure Margery had nothing to do with it. She was quite devoted to her aunt, and as the poor girl has no money, I don't know how she will live now that Madame is dead."

The inspector thought for a moment. He was a tall, thin man, rather military in appearance, and with a wooden, expressionless face, which he found of great service in hiding his thoughts when examining those he suspected. He certainly did not suspect Miss Bull, and seemed inclined to make her his coadjutor. In proof of this he made her accompany him to the room wherein Mrs Jersey lay dead.

"It's not far from the front door," mused Inspector Quex. "Could any one have entered?"

"No, I am sure of that," put in Miss Bull, emphatically. "Madame always locked the front door every night herself and kept the key. It could not be opened in the morning until she chose."

"Who opened it this morning?"

"I did. I knew that the key would be in Madame's pocket."

"And it was?"

"Yes. She must have locked the door as usual,

and then have gone to put the light out in her sitting-room before going upstairs."

"Was that before eleven?"

"I can't say. I did not leave my room after ten. But Margery may have seen some one as she went up to her bedroom when she left me."

"I'll question the girl," said Quex, and entered the sitting-room.

It was of no great size, with one window, which looked out onto the square. This was locked, and, even if it had not been, no one could have climbed in, as Quex saw that the area was below. "And Madame chained the area gate every night with her own hands," explained Miss Bull, who was watching him.

The inspector turned suddenly toward her. "It seems to me that the deceased was over-cautious. Was she afraid?"

"I think she was," admitted Miss Bull. "She had a habit of looking over her shoulder, and, as I have stated, was particular as to bolts and bars. But she was a secretive woman, and never said anything to me about her fears, if she had any."

"Were you great friends?"

"No," replied the old maid, bluntly, "we were not. Madame behaved in an extremely rude manner, and had she lived I should have given her notice. I never liked her," added Miss Bull, with feminine spite.

"You'll be all the more likely to speak the truth then," said Quex, cynically, and turned to examine the body.

Madame was still in the black-silk dress which she wore on the previous night. Seated at the round center-table, she had evidently been struck from behind, and killed before she had time to cry out. Her arms were on the table, and her head had fallen



forward. The furniture of the room was not in disorder, the red table-cloth was not even ruffled. The murder had been committed without haste or noise, as Quex pointed out to Miss Bull.

"Whosoever murdered her must have been a friend," said he.

"It doesn't seem a friendly act to kill a defenseless woman," said Miss Bull, looking coldly on the limp figure.

"You don't quite understand. What I mean is that Mrs Jersey knew the person who killed her."

Miss Bull shook her head. "I don't agree with you," she observed, and Quex was astonished that she should dare to contradict. "She was struck from behind, before she had time to turn her head."

"Quite so. But the assassin must have entered the room, and unless the deceased was deaf—"

"Madame had particularly sharp ears."

"Then that makes it all the more certain. Had any one unexpected entered she would have been on the alert; there would have been a struggle. Now we see that the furniture is not disturbed, therefore we can argue from this that Mrs Jersey was in friendly conversation with the assassin. She was seated at the table, and the assassin was at her back, which shows a certain amount of trust. In fact, Miss Bull, the person who committed this murder was the last person Mrs Jersey expected to hurt her in any way."

"She had no enemies that I knew of."

"I talk rather of friends," said Quex, coolly. "You have not been listening to my argument."

"Oh, I quite understand. But I don't fancy that Madame had any friends either. She was a woman who kept very much to herself."

"Do you know anything of her past?"

"Absolutely nothing. She took this house some

fourteen or fifteen years ago, I believe. I have been here ten, and was very comfortable, save that **Ma-**dame and I disagreed on many points. She was always rude to me, and I don't think she was a lady." Miss Bull drew herself up. "My father was a general," she declared proudly.

But Quex was too busy examining the room to attend to Miss Bull's family history. He searched for the weapon with which the crime had been committed, but could find none. There was no blood on the furniture, although some had trickled down from the wound onto the table-cloth. The blow must have been struck strongly and surely, and with the power of a deadly hatred. It was at this moment that the doctor arrived, and, turning the body over to him, Quex conducted Miss Bull back to the drawing-room, where he examined all who were in the house. "Has any one left this morning?" he asked. Jarvey had seen Mr Granger go out, and said so. Even while he was speaking Mr Granger returned, and, filled with suspicion, Quex examined him first.

Granger, when he saw what the inspector was bent upon, expressed the greatest indignation. "How dare you accuse a gentleman of such a thing?" he cried. "I went out to compose my nerves."

"Into the fog?" asked Quex, doubtfully.

"Yes, sir, and I should have gone out into snow and hail if I had desired. There was no intimation that none were to leave the house. Had a notice been given to that effect I should have remained."

"I beg your pardon," said Quex, seeing that the old gentleman was fuming, and seeing also that such a senile creature, with so sheeplike a face, was innocent enough, "but it is my duty to be suspicious."

"But not to accuse innocent people of a crime, sir."

"No. But, for the sake of an example, will you tell me what you did with yourself since leaving the drawing-room last night at ten?"

"Certainly. I have no reason to conceal my doings, officer," said Mr. Granger, angrily. "I retired to my bedroom at ten and to bed. The last I saw of Madame she was standing on the door-step bidding farewell to her guests. In the morning I was awakened by the news of the murder, and went out to walk off the horror produced by the sight of that poor woman."

"Did you see the body?"

"We all saw the body, till Miss Bull——"

"I turned them out and locked the door," put in Miss Bull, sharply.

"It was as well that nothing should be disturbed in the room till the police arrived. That was my argument."

"And a very good one," said Quex, approvingly. "You have a head on your shoulders, Miss."

"My father was a general," replied the old maid, nodding, "and I inherit his talent for organization."

The next witness examined was Margery, and she refused to open her mouth unless she sat by Miss Bull. The old maid held Margery's hand and coaxed her into answering when she proved recalcitrant. Quex could not but admire the way in which Miss Bull managed the lumpish creature.

"You left the drawing-room with this lady?" he asked, indicating Miss Bull, and speaking in a persuasive tone.

"Yes. We played 'Patience' in Miss Bull's bedroom. I did it twice."

"At what time did you leave?"

"About eleven—just before it."

"Did the clock strike the hour when you were in your own bedroom?"

"No," said Margery, trying to collect her wits, "when I was in the passage."

"What were you doing in the passage? It would only take you a few minutes to get to your room, would it not?"

"Yes," put in Miss Bull. "My bedroom is on the second floor, and Margery's is on the fourth, right above my head. You could easily have got to your room before the clock struck, Margery."

"I did try to," admitted the girl, "but my aunt kept me talking."

Quex sat up. "Did you speak to your aunt at that hour?"

"Yes. She met me walking up to my room, and scolded me for being out of bed at that hour. I said I had been with Miss Bull, and——"

"And Madame made polite remarks about me," said the old maid, grimly. "Oh, I can well understand what she said. But it would seem, Mr Inspector, that Margery was the last person to see Madame alive."

"We'll see," said Quex, who was not going to be taught his business even by so clever a person as Miss Bull. "Was there any one else about?" he asked Margery.

"No. My aunt said that every one was in bed but me, and that she would not have it. The clock struck eleven, and she called me names. She then took me by the arm and pushed me into my room and locked the door. Yes, she did," nodded Margery, vindictively; "she locked the door."

"Why did she do that?" asked Quex, staring.

"I don't know. I wasn't doing anything," grumbled Margery, "but she said she wouldn't have me wandering about the house at all hours of the night and locked me in. I couldn't get out this morning till Miss Bull let me out."

"Margery usually brings me my cup of tea," explained Miss Bull, "and as she did not come this morning as usual I was anxious. When the alarm came I went to look for Margery in her room. The key was in the door, but the door was locked. I released Margery."

"Oh, the key was in the door," mused Quex. "It would seem, then, that the deceased simply turned the key and left it. Humph! I wonder why she locked the girl in?"

Miss Bull shrugged her thin shoulders. "It was spite on her part," she said. "Madame never cared to see Margery with me."

"Because I love you so," said the girl with an adoring look, and Miss Bull patted her hand fondly. It was strange, thought the inspector, that so clever and refined a woman should love so stupid and coarse-looking a girl. But like does not always draw to like.

While Quex was thus examining the witnesses, Train and Brendon were seated in the sitting-room of the former, discussing the crime. Brendon was gloomy, for in the unexpected death of Mrs Jersey he saw the downfall of his hopes of proving his legitimacy. "There's no chance of my marrying Dorothy now," he said with a sigh. "I'll remain plain George Brendon to the end of my days, and a bachelor at that."

"It's awful!" gasped Leonard, who was white and haggard. "I never expected that my search for types would lead me into the neighborhood of a tragedy. Who could have killed her?"

"I can't say."

"I wonder if her death has anything to do with your affairs?"

Brendon looked up suddenly and with a stern, flushed face. "Train," he said sharply, "whatever

you do, say nothing about what I told you last night."

"Yes. But what you told me might lead to the discovery of the assassin."

"I don't care if it does," said Brendon, angrily, and rising to his feet to emphasize his determination, "you are to keep my confidence."

"Oh, I shan't say anything. But do you think——"

"I think nothing. But I am sure that my affairs have nothing to do with this death. I came to see Mrs Jersey, and this morning I should have had the truth out of her. But she is dead, and so all my projects go to the four winds. But I don't want them spoken of."

"You can depend upon me," said Leonard, dominated by the strong will of his friend. "But who could have——"

"I tell you I don't know," cried George, restlessly. "How you do harp on that subject."

"It is the subject of the hour," retorted Train.

"And a most unpleasant one. Here I shall have to remain until that police-officer questions me."

"What story will you tell?"

"Any story but the one I told to you," retorted Brendon.

"Well," said Leonard, after a pause, "you can rely upon me. I shall not say anything to get you into trouble."

Brendon laughed, but not pleasantly. "My good fellow, I have done nothing wrong. Even if my tale were told I could not be accused of having to do anything with this murder."

"Oh, I didn't mean that for one moment," protested Train, uneasily.

"I know you didn't. Nevertheless, if this police inspector knew that I told you he might get it into his stupid head that—well." Brendon broke off

abruptly. "I don't know what he mightn't think. However, I shall answer his questions as to my visit here and then go away."

"I'll go also," said Train with a shudder. "I can't stop here after what has occurred. It's terrible. To think of that poor woman murdered. How lucky I locked my door last night!"

Brendon stopped in his walk and looked sharply at the young man. "Why did you lock your door?" he asked surprised.

"Well, you see, after Mrs Jersey came into the sitting-room I didn't like to think of her prowling about. One is so helpless when one is asleep," and Train shuddered.

"Did you expect her to murder you?" asked Brendon, derisively.

"I didn't expect anything," retorted Leonard, rather nettled, "but I didn't want her to come into my rooms, so I got out of bed and locked the sitting-room door."

"Not your bedroom door?"

"No, the sitting-room door; so both you and I were quite safe from her prying."

Brendon looked steadily at Train and gave a short laugh. "Yes. As you locked the sitting-room door she could as little enter as you or I could go out. Leonard—" he paused and pinched his lip—"I do not think it will be wise for you to tell the inspector this."

"Why not? You and I are innocent."

"That goes without the saying," answered George, sharply; "but the less we have to do with this unpleasant matter the better. I suppose we, in common with every one else here, will be called to give evidence at the inquest. Once that is done and Mrs Jersey is safely buried I wash my hands of the whole affair."

Train shuddered. "So do I," said he; "I am the last man in the world to wish to pursue the subject. But who can be guilty? It must be some one in the house!"

"I suppose so," replied Brendon, "unless Mrs Jersey had a visitor last night."

"She might have had," said Leonard. "When I locked the sitting-room door, and that was about half-past eleven I think, I heard the closing of the front door."

"The deuce you did."

"Yes, I put my head out and listened to see if all was quiet. I distinctly heard the front door close."

"She must have had a visitor," said Brendon, thoughtfully; "yet as she alone could have let that visitor out, and as she must have been alive to do so, the visitor cannot be the assassin."

"The visitor might have killed her and then have closed the door himself."

"Himself? How do you know the visitor was a man? It might have been a woman. Besides, Miss Bull told me that the door was locked as usual, and that she took the key this morning to open it from Mrs Jersey's pocket. No, Train, the person who killed Mrs Jersey is in the house. But were I you I should say as little as possible to the inspector about this."

Leonard took this advice, and, when questioned, simply stated that he had retired to bed at eleven and had heard nothing. Brendon made a similar statement, and Quex saw no reason to doubt their evidence.

He questioned all the boarders and all the servants, but could learn nothing likely to throw any light on the darkness which concealed the crime. No one had heard a noise in the night, no one had



heard a scream, and it was conclusively proved that every one in the house was in bed by eleven o'clock; the majority, indeed, before that hour. Jarvey had been the last to retire, at half-past ten o'clock, and then he had left Madame in her sitting-room with a book and a glass of negus. She sent him off in a hurry and with, as he expressed it, "a flea in his ear"—being somewhat out of temper. It was thus apparent that Margery, who saw Madame at the striking of the hour, was the last person to see her alive. Mrs Jersey went to her own sitting-room and there had been struck down.

"It was about twelve o'clock that she was stabbed," said the doctor, after he had made his examination; "but I can go only by the condition of the body. I should say a little before or after twelve. She was stabbed in the neck with a sharp instrument."

"With a knife?" said the inspector.

"No," rejoined the doctor, decisively, "it was with a dagger—by a kind of stiletto. It was not by an ordinary knife that the wound was inflicted," and then the doctor who loved to hear himself talk, went into technical details about the death. He proved beyond doubt that Mrs Jersey must have died almost immediately with hardly a groan. For some reason Quex took one and all into the chamber of death and showed them the corpse. Perhaps he expected that the sight would shake the nerves of the murderer, supposing the murderer was among those who saw the body. But no one flinched in the way he expected. Mrs Jersey was as dead as a door-nail, but no one knew and no one could prove who had struck the blow.

## CHAPTER IV

### A NINE-DAYS' WONDER

**O**N account of its mystery the murder of Mrs Jersey made a great sensation. The season was dull, and there was nothing of interest in the newspapers, therefore the mysterious crime was a godsend to the reporters. They flocked in shoals to Amelia Square and haunted the Jersey mansion like unquiet ghosts. Whenever any boarder went out for a walk he or she would be questioned by eager gentlemen of the press. Idle sightseers of a morbid turn of mind came to look at the place where the crime had been committed, and pictures of the house appeared in several papers. From being a peaceful neighborhood, Amelia Square became quite lively.

The boarders found all this most unpleasant. This rude awakening from their sleepy life was too much for them, and the majority made preparations to leave as soon as the inquest was over. Until then they were under police surveillance and could not leave the neighborhood, a restriction which in itself was sufficiently unpleasant. Brendon found it particularly so, as he was anxious to get back to his own rooms at Kensington and to his work. But even when he told Inspector Quex that he was merely a visitor and knew nothing about the matter, that zealous officer objected to his going. Perhaps, had Brendon insisted, he might have gained his point, but he did not think it was worth while to make the fact of his stay in the Jersey mansion too

public, and therefore held his peace. He stopped with Leonard as usual, but the two men were not such friends as they had been.

Why Train had changed toward him Brendon could not understand. But ever since Leonard had been submitted to the ordeal of seeing the corpse he had been an altered man. From being gay he was now dull; instead of talking volubly, as he usually did, he was silent for hours at a stretch, and he appeared to shun Brendon's company. George knew that Train was impressionable and sensitive, and thought that the sight of the dead and the ordeal of the examination had been too much for his weak nerves. This might have been the case, but Leonard never gave him the satisfaction of knowing if his diagnosis was correct. After a time George ceased to ply him with questions, and contented himself with the usual courtesies of life. But in his heart he felt the change deeply. Fool as Train was, Brendon liked him sufficiently to resent his altered demeanor.

At the inquest nothing was discovered likely to elucidate the mystery. The boarders all gave the same evidence they had already given to Quex. Certainly it came out that Miss Bull had prophesied that Madame would die a violent death, but when questioned on this point she merely said that she had done so because the death card had been turned up. Taken in conjunction with another card, according to the reading employed by fortune-tellers, a violent death was assuredly prophesied. But, as Miss Bull said, no one was more astonished than herself at the speedy fulfillment of the prediction. "I told the fortunes on that night for amusement only," she said, "as I do not believe there is any sense in such things. It was mere chance, nothing more. I am not a believer in cards as prophets."

But the coincidence was so extraordinary that

several of the newspapers hinted that the old maid knew more than she chose to tell. Miss Bull was up in arms at once, and, after consulting her solicitor, threatened actions for libel until such statements were withdrawn. And certainly, on the face of it, the accusation was absurd. The majority of people who did believe in fortune-telling by the cards insisted that Miss Bull was quite an adept. Several urged her to set up in business, promising her their patronage, but the little old maid drew herself up, and, mentioning that her father had been a general, refused to entertain the idea.

Beyond this episode there was little interest to be found in the details of the inquest. It appeared that every one was in bed by eleven, that every one had slept soundly more or less, and that all were astonished and shocked when the tragedy came to light next morning. Train could have created a sensation by stating that he had heard the front door open after eleven; but, true to his promise to George, he said nothing about this. Miss Bull, on the other hand, declared that the front door was locked as usual, and that she had taken the key from the dead woman's pocket to open it when the police entered. It would appear that Mrs Jersey had been murdered by some one in the house. Yet not one scrap of evidence could be found to show that any one in the house could possibly be guilty. The boarders were all old, the servants all ordinary human beings, and no motive could be assigned to any one person for the committal of so cruel a crime. Moreover, the fact that the instrument used was a stiletto (and the doctor held to that) showed that the crime must have been committed by a foreigner. The only foreign person in the house on the night in question was Fritz, the Swiss waiter. But he would not have killed a fly, and, moreover,

exculpated himself entirely with the aid of Jarvey, in whose room he slept. The jury brought in a verdict of murder against some person or persons unknown, and that was all that could be done toward the elucidation of the Amelia Square crime.

"There's only one thing that wasn't spoken of," said Quex, when he saw the boarders in the drawing-room for the last time; "it seems that Mrs Jersey always put out the light above the door at eleven, or when the guests departed. On this occasion it burned all night, and, as it shines behind crimson glass, such a red window might be a guide to any one who did not know the house, but who had been given that sign whereby to distinguish it."

"I can explain that," said Granger, who was present. "When Madame was bidding farewell to her guests she thought that some of them might be lost in the fog. Therefore she called out after them that she would let the light burn later so that any might be able to retrace their steps."

"Well," said Quex, scratching his head, "that explanation is clear."

"And there is no use for it," put in Miss Bull, "since the front door was locked and no one entered the house on that night."

"That's just it," said the inspector, sagaciously. "As all you ladies and gentlemen are clearly innocent the crime must have been committed by some one from outside. Now, is there any one to whom Madame gave a latch-key?"

"None of us had latch-keys," said Harmer. "Madame would not allow such a thing."

"Oh, I don't mean you, or those like you, Mr Harmer. At your age a latch-key is not necessary. But Mrs Jersey may have given one to a friend of hers who came to see her on that night. Had she any friend in whom she would place such confidence?"

"No," said Miss Bull, decisively. "She trusted no one that far. And I don't think she had a single friend outside this house."

"And very few in it," muttered Mrs Taine, who on various occasions had suffered from Madame's tongue.

"In that case," said Quex, rising to take his leave, "there is nothing more to be discussed. Who killed Mrs Jersey, or why she was killed, will probably never be known. Ladies and gentlemen, good-day," and the inspector bowed himself stiffly out of the room, with the air of a man who washed his hands of the whole concern.

And, after all, what could he do? There was no proof likely to indicate any one as the assassin, and since Leonard kept silent on the point of the front door having been opened after eleven, it was impossible to say that the criminal had entered the house. Had Mr Inspector known of this he might have made further inquiries; but he knew nothing and departed extremely perplexed. The Amelia Square crime was one of those mysterious murders which would have to be relegated to obscurity for sheer want of evidence.

"When are you going back to Duke Street?" asked Brendon as he took his leave of Train.

"This very day," replied the young man, gloomily. "I don't want to stop a moment longer than I can help in this awful house."

"I expect many of the others are of your way of thinking, Train. But, so far as I can see, there is no hope of learning who killed the woman."

"If you had only allowed me to tell Quex about the door being opened he might have traced the assassin."

"I don't think so." Brendon shook his head. "It was a foggy night, and whosoever entered would be able to slink away without being seen."

"I am not so sure of that. There is only one outlet to the square, and there stands a policeman on guard."

"The policeman would not be there all the time," argued Brendon, "to say nothing of the fog, which would hide any one desirous of evading recognition, as the assassin assuredly must have wished."

"All the same, I wish I had told Quex."

"Well, then, tell him if you like," said George, vexed with this pertinacity.

"But you asked me not to."

"Only because I fear, with your weak nature, that one question will lead to another, until the whole of my private affairs will come to light. I don't want those to be known at Scotland Yard, let alone the chance that I might be accused of the crime."

"Oh, that's ridiculous! You could not have left the sitting-room unless I had let you out, and there is no door from your bedroom."

"That is true enough," answered Brendon, with an ironical smile, the significance of which was lost on Train. "But if the whole of my story came to light you might be accused of helping me to get rid of the woman."

"I?" Leonard's hair almost rose on end. "How could I be mixed up in it?"

"Well, see here," argued Brendon, who thought it just as well to make Train's own safety depend upon the discretion of too free a tongue. "I tell you about this house, and on my recommendation you come here. I come to stop with you and reveal my reasons for coming. These have to do with the possession of a secret by the murdered woman. All that, to a policeman, would be suspicious. What would be easier than for me to go down the stairs and, when the woman refused to confess as to my legitimacy, to stab her? Then I could return to my

bed, and you could prove an alibi on my behalf by your tale of having locked the sitting-room door."

Train shuddered. "I see how easily we can get into trouble. I shall say nothing. I wish I had not come here. I shall go abroad until all blows over."

"Why," said Brendon, in scorn, "what is there to blow over? No more will be heard of this matter if you hold your tongue. The inquest is at an end, the woman will be buried shortly, and you will be back leading your own life. So far as I am concerned you know that I am not guilty, and that I could not have left my room since you locked that special door. Then, as to hearing the front door open, that may have been a hallucination on your part."

"No. I am sure it wasn't. I heard distinctly."

"Well—" Brendon shrugged his shoulders, but seemed uncomfortable—"I dare say the assassin came and went in that way. But if he, or she, did, the door was found fast locked in the morning, unless Miss Bull is telling a lie."

"She might be."

"I don't see what she has to gain. But there's no use talking any further. The matter is ended so far as I am concerned."

"What will you do now?"

"I am going to see Dorothy," said Brendon, "and tell her that there is no chance of our marriage. Nor is there, for I cannot see my way to prove my legitimacy. We must part, and I shall probably go down the country for six months or so, to finish my novel and to get rid of my heartache."

Train remained silent, looking at the ground. Then he glanced at his friend in a doubtful way. "What has become of your yellow holly?"

Brendon produced it from his pocket. "It withered, so I took it out of my coat and put it into this envelope."



"Do you know if Miss Ward gave any one else a piece of yellow holly?"

Brendon stared at this strange question. "Not to my knowledge. Why do you ask?"

Train shuffled his feet and looked down again. "It is an exceptionally rare sort of thing," he said uneasily, "and its effect on Mrs Jersey was so strange that I wondered if she connected it with any trouble or disaster."

"You made the same remark before," said Brendon, dryly, "and we could arrive at no conclusion. But in any case I don't see that Miss Ward giving me the holly has anything to do with Mrs Jersey's alarm—if indeed she was alarmed."

"I think she was," said Train, decisively, "and if I were you I would ask Miss Ward why she gave you the yellow holly."

"What would be the sense in that?"

"You might learn why Mrs Jersey was startled."

Brendon laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "Your active brain is building up a perfect romance," he declared. "There can be no connection between Dorothy and Mrs Jersey."

"Did she know you were coming to stop here on that night?"

"Yes. I told her so when I met her in the Park in the morning. It was then that she asked me to afternoon tea."

"And at the afternoon tea she gave you the holly?"

"Yes. You seem to think she did it on purpose that Mrs Jersey—"

Train interrupted him quickly. "It is you who are building up a romance now," he said. "I never thought anything of the sort. But I do say that the coincidence is strange."

"What coincidence?"

"That you should have in your coat a flower—I

suppose one can call berried holly a flower—which awakens unpleasant recollections in Mrs Jersey's breast."

"In a word, Train, you fancy that an inquiry into the circumstances of the yellow holly may lead to a detection of the assassin."

"I don't go so far as that. But I should not be surprised if something of that sort did eventuate."

"Then you do go so far as that," said Brendon with a shrug. "However, there is nothing more to be said. My advice to you is to hold your tongue lest we should both get into trouble."

"I am absolutely innocent."

"So am I if it comes to that. All the same, the less said the better."

Train shook hands with more cordiality than he had hitherto displayed. "I'll be silent for my own sake as well as for yours," he said, and the two parted, Leonard to pack up, and Brendon to journey with his bag for Kensington. Both men were conscious of a relief when they took leave of each other.

"I wish he hadn't come here," said Train when Brendon departed.

"I wish I had held my tongue," muttered George when he was in his cab. "That fool seems to think I know something about this matter."

Of course the economy of the mansion was disordered when the crime was committed. But, thanks to the firm handling of Miss Bull, who now took the reins which had fallen from the hands of Madame, a few days put a different complexion on affairs. Margery knew where her aunt kept the money, and Miss Bull made several of the boarders behindhand pay up. Thus there was enough money to go on with, and Miss Bull decided to wait until after the funeral, before deciding what she intended to do herself. When Mrs Jersey was buried her lawyer

made his appearance with the will. It was read to Margery, and Miss Bull stopped beside the poor girl as the only friend she had in the world. The will was short and concise, as it seemed that there was very little to leave. The lawyer read it and then looked at Margery to hear what she had to say. The girl simply stared at him blankly, as though not comprehending his meaning, and Miss Bull touched her elbow.

"Do you hear what he says?" she asked rebukingly.

"Yes," replied Margery, "but I don't understand. Haven't I any money?"

The lawyer would have read the will again, but Miss Bull held up her hand.

"She is stunned with grief," said Miss Bull, "and is not capable of attending to business. Go and lie down, Margery, and I will speak to this gentleman."

"You do exactly what you like, dear Miss Bull," said Margery, rising, and then turned to the lawyer. "Let Miss Bull do exactly as she likes. I leave all in her hands."

"The most sensible thing you can do," said the legal adviser under his breath, and when Margery had left the room he turned to the old maid. "Is she an idiot?"

"By no means. But she is not very clever. I have taken a great interest in her, as, to tell you the truth, Mr James, she was badly treated by her aunt. If you will explain the will to me I will see what can be done to put things straight. I am sorry for the girl and she is devoted to me."

"It is lucky she has such a friend," said Mr James, heartily. He did not care much for Miss Bull, whose very presence seemed to inspire mistrust, but she was acting very well on this occasion. Moreover, as Margery was not likely to prove a lucrative

client, Mr James was anxious to shuffle the business onto Miss Bull's shoulders and get out of it as fast as he could. "What is it you wish to know?" he asked.

"About this will," said Miss Bull, laying one thin finger on the document. "Madame leaves to Margery Watson, her niece, the money in the green box in her sitting-room, and also the jewels, which I presume mean the diamonds."

"Yes. Also, if you will recollect, the clothes of the deceased lady."

"Is there nothing else?" asked Miss Bull, raising her black eyes inquiringly. "What of the lease of this house?"

"That is the property of Lord Derrington, and he only let the house to Mrs Jersey by the year."

"Is not that rather strange?"

"Very strange. But the whole connection of Lord Derrington with my late client is strange. I know that she received from him an annuity of five hundred a year and the lease of this house—by the year, remember—from December to December. Now she is dead the annuity lapses, and the lease naturally will not be renewed after next month."

"It is now the end of November," said Miss Bull, quite composed. "I understand you to say that the lease expires when December—"

"It ends on the 31st of December," explained James, "and as Mrs Jersey is dead it will not be renewed. Lord Derrington, so far as I know, has no interest in Miss Margery Watson."

"What interest had he in Mrs Jersey?" asked Miss Bull, scenting a scandal, and her eyes brightening.

"I can't tell you that, and if I could I would not."

"Quite right. I beg your pardon for asking, but you see in the interests of that poor girl I wish to know exactly how matters stand."

"They stand as I tell you," said James, and rose to go. "I have nothing more to do in the matter and my connection with the late Mrs Jersey ceases here."

"One moment," said Miss Bull, quietly. "What of the furniture?"

"That is also the property of Lord Derrington. He bought the house as it stood from the executor of the last owner, Mr Anthony Lockwood, fifteen years ago. Mrs Jersey wished to set up a boarding-house, so Lord Derrington placed her in here. Every stick in the place belongs to him. Should Miss Watson leave she goes with the jewels, the money in the green box, and with her deceased aunt's clothes."

"A very poor outfit to start life on at her age," said Miss Bull, rising in her prim manner. "By the way, Mr James, what is the name of the late Mr Lockwood's executor?"

"Roger Ireland," replied the lawyer, looking rather surprised. "Why do you ask?"

"For my own satisfaction, Mr James. If no one else will assist this poor girl I shall do so. Good-day."

James departed with a better opinion of Miss Bull, although at any time he had no reason to have a bad one. But her manner inspired mistrust, and, kindly as she appeared to be acting towards Margery, he could not help thinking that there was more in her action than mere philanthropy. "You're a deep one," thought James. "I shouldn't wonder if we heard more of you."

But so far as James was personally concerned he heard no more of the little woman. Miss Bull collected the boarders in the drawing-room after dinner and made a speech. She said that it was Margery Watson's intention to keep on the house, and that the terms would be as before. If any chose to stop they would be welcome, but those who decided to go could have their bills made out at once. Hav-

ing thus acted as the mouthpiece of Margery, Miss Bull took the girl away to the sitting-room of the late Mrs Jersey, the very one in which the tragedy had taken place. Margery was unwilling to enter, much less hold a conversation there, but Miss Bull, who had no nerves to speak of and a very strong will, laughed her out of this folly.

"Now my dear Margery," she said, when the girl was seated, "I want you to pay the greatest attention to what I am about to say, and to repeat nothing of my conversation."

"You are my best friend," said Margery, looking at the peaked white face with adoring eyes. "I shall do whatever you say."

"Good child," said Miss Bull, patting the hand that was laid confidently on her lap. "Listen, child. Lord Derrington is the owner of this house, and he leased it to your aunt by the year—a very strange arrangement, for which there ought to be some explanation. I am going to seek it from Lord Derrington."

"But he won't tell you anything, Miss Bull."

The old maid tightened her thin lips. "I think he will," she said in a rather ominous manner; "at all events, there is no harm in my trying. With regard to the annuity—"

"What annuity?"

"I forgot—you don't know about that. Well, there is no need that you should. But it seems that Lord Derrington allowed your late aunt an annuity of five hundred a year. I don't know the reason why he did so, and as such reason is not pertinent to matters in hand I do not wish to know, but the annuity must lapse. It is not likely that Lord Derrington will continue it to you." She paused and looked at the girl. "Your parents are dead, I believe, Margery?"

"Yes. For many years I have been with my aunt. She was my only relative, dear Miss Bull."

"All the better. I don't want other people interfering," said Miss Bull in her icy way. "Well, Margery, I shall see if I can get Lord Derrington to renew the lease to you, and I shall be your security. With the money in hand—I have counted it, and with that in the bank it amounts to two hundred pounds—we can continue the boarding-house. A few of the boarders will go, but many will remain, as they will not get anywhere so cheap a place. You will be the nominal head of the house, but in reality I shall manage. Do you agree?"

"I am your slave," cried Margery with melodramatic intensity.

"You are my friend," said Miss Bull, her thin lips relaxing. "I am a lonely woman, Margery, though I still have a surviving sister—" her lips tightened again as she said this—"and I love you, my dear, for your goodness. Well, we shall keep on the boarding-house, and you, poor child, will be preserved from the terrible life which would otherwise be your portion."

"How good you are—how good you are!"

"A little selfish also," said Miss Bull, kissing the girl. "I do not wish to leave this place or lose you. I am growing old, and a change would break my heart."

She said this as though she really believed that she possessed such an organ. Mrs. Jersey always said that a heart was lacking in Miss Bull's maiden breast: but certainly the way in which the old woman was treating the helpless girl showed that she was better than she looked. And perhaps—as Mr James considered—Miss Bull had an ax to grind on her own account.

However this might be, from that moment Miss

Bull was in charge of the Amelia Square establishment. Whatever means she used to induce Lord Derrington to consent, she certainly managed to get the lease renewed in Margery's name. Some of the boarders went; but others came in their place, and these being younger added to the gayety of the house. So all was settled, and Miss Bull became a person of importance. She was the power behind the throne, and ruled judiciously. In this way did she do away with the reputation of the house as a place where a crime had been committed. In a year all was forgotten.



## CHAPTER V

### A LOVERS' MEETING

**E**VERY one who was any one knew the Honorable Mrs Ward. She was a fluffy-haired kitten of a woman, more like a Dresden china shepherdess than a mere human being. Nothing could be prettier than her face and figure, and nothing more engaging than her manners. With her yellow hair, her charming face, and her melting blue eyes, she managed to hold her own against younger women. The late Mr Ward, Lord Ransome's son, had been a fast young man, devoted to the turf and to his pretty wife. But he was killed when riding in a steeplechase two years after his marriage, and left his widow alone in the world with one daughter for consolation in her affliction. Mrs Ward being in want of money—for her deceased father had been a general with nothing but his pay—played her cards so well with regard to her father-in-law, that he allowed her a good income and thought she was the most perfect of women. But Lord Ransome was the only one of the family who thought so, for the other relatives fought rather shy of the pretty, pleading widow.

Not that Mrs Ward minded. She characterized the women as frumps and the men as fools, and, having enough to live on comfortably, set up a house in Curzon Street. It was thought that she would marry again; and probably she would have done so had a sufficiently rich husband with a title

been forthcoming. But somehow no one worth capturing ever came Mrs Ward's way, and as time went on she chose to assume the role of a devoted mother, and—as she phrased it—to live again in her daughter. This was quite wrong, as Dorothy Ward was a slim, serious-minded girl of nineteen, not given to gayety, and was one who was anxious to marry a husband with mind rather than with money. How frivolous little Mrs Ward came to have such a Puritan daughter no one ever could make out. She resembled her mother neither in face, nor in manner, nor in tastes. Mrs Ward openly lamented that Dorothy was such a difficult girl to manage, which meant that Dorothy had refused several good matches, and had declined to be guided entirely by her mother's opinion. When the Earl of Summerslea proposed and was not accepted, Mrs Ward was furious, but Dorothy said steadily that she would never marry a brute with a title.

"You'll marry any one I choose," said Mrs Ward when the two were discussing the matter.

"Certainly not Lord Summerslea," rejoined Dorothy, steadily.

"And certainly not that penniless George Brendon," retorted her mother. "You shall not throw yourself away on him."

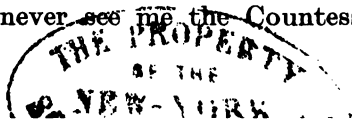
"He is a good man and a clever man, and a man whom any woman might be proud of winning, mother."

"And a man with no money and no position. Who is he? What is his family? No one ever heard of him."

"They will one day, when he becomes famous."

"Oh, as a writing-person. As though any one cared two pins about that sort of thing. I want to see you a countess."

"You shall never see me the Countess of Sum-



merslea. I know all about that man. He is bad and dissipated."

"O Lord! as if that mattered," cried Mrs Ward with supreme contempt. "Your father was the same, yet we got on all right."

"I am sure you did," said Dorothy, with bitter meaning, upon which Mrs Ward showed her claws. Her friends called her a kitten, but she was a cat in reality and could scratch on occasions. But all her scratching could not make Dorothy Lady Summerslea.

Hating Brendon, and knowing that her daughter liked him, it was supposed by Mrs Ward's friends that the young man would be sent to the right-about, and that Dorothy would be kept out of his way. But Mrs Ward knew her daughter too well to take such a disastrous course.

"My dear," she said to an intimate friend, "if I did that, Dorothy is just the kind of annoying girl to run away with him and live in a garret. If I let them meet they will not think of marriage, and I dare say Dorothy will get tired of Brendon. He is so shabby in his dress, and so poor, that after a time she will cease to like him. No! No! I'll let him follow her wherever he likes, and meet her on all occasions. They will grow sick of one another."

In an ordinary case this recipe might have answered. But Dorothy respected as well as loved George Brendon, and, every time she met him, grew to admire and love him more. Mrs Ward became quite exasperated, and redoubled her efforts to sicken Dorothy of the "creature," as she called Brendon. She took to praising him on all occasions, and sometimes asked him to dinner. At the same time she constantly abused young Walter Vane, who was Lord Derrington's grandson and heir. He was the man she wished Dorothy to marry, as one day

he would have a title and fifteen thousand a year. But in spite of this Machiavellian policy Dorothy still continued to love George, and expressed a hearty dislike for Walter Vane, whom she characterized as a "weaking."

"If he had only the grit of his grandfather I might respect him."

Mrs Ward turned pale under her rouge when she heard this. "Oh, no, no! Lord Derrington is a terrible old man. Were Walter such as he is, I should not ask you to marry him."

"You would marry me to the Prince of Darkness himself if it suited your purpose," said her daughter, calmly, from which speech it will be seen that Miss Ward had small respect for her fascinating mother.

The two did not assimilate, as their dispositions were so different. Mrs Ward complained that Dorothy was too religious, and Dorothy found the frivolous world in which her mother moved dull beyond words. It so happened that Dorothy stayed mostly at home or went out with one of her aunts, who was something of her type, while Mrs Ward enjoyed herself at Hurlingham and Monte Carlo. The little woman always managed to keep on the right side, as she had no notion of losing her position in society, or the income which Lord Ransome allowed her; but within limits she was extremely fast. She generally had a number of young men at her heels, and made use of them in betting and in getting boxes for the theaters, for suppers at the Cecil, and gloves, when nothing else was to be had. But she managed all these things so discreetly that no one had a word to say, and the general impression was that she was a dear little woman with a stiff daughter—quite a trial. And if some old frumps did praise up Dorothy and condemn the mother, they were in the minority.

Things were in this position when the murder of Mrs Jersey took place. Dorothy read about it in the papers, and knowing that George had gone to stop in the house with Train, was extremely anxious to hear particulars. She wrote to his Kensington address asking him to call, but received no reply. Then she saw that he gave evidence at the inquest, and two days later George made his appearance at the Curzon Street house. Mrs Ward, who had been voluble in her expressions regarding Brendon's "love for low company," so she put it, sailed toward him with open hands. She always welcomed Brendon in this bright, girlish, kittenish way, as it was part of her scheme. She thought so serious a man would never relish a frivolous mother-in-law, and hoped to get rid of him in this way. But Brendon was too much in love with Dorothy to mind the vagaries of her fashionable parent.

"My dear Mr Brendon," cried Mrs Ward in her usual gushing manner, "I am so glad to see you. The murder, you know. I saw your name in the papers. How exciting! how romantic! Tell us all about it."

"There is nothing to tell, Mrs Ward," said George, glancing round the room and seeing that Dorothy was absent. "All I know is set forth in the papers."

Mrs Ward arranged herself on the sofa and laughed joyously. "Quite exciting it is," she said. "I wonder who killed the poor woman, and how did you come to be there on the very night she died?"

This last question was asked sharply, and with a keen glance. George was rather taken aback, but not thinking she had any intention in what she said, answered, soberly enough: "I went to see a friend, Mrs Ward. It was unfortunate that I chose that night."

"Well, of course you didn't know," said Mrs

Ward, artlessly. "But fancy knowing any one living in an out-of-the-way place like that. But you do know such queer people."

George thought he knew none queerer than Mrs Ward herself, but he suppressed this speech as impolite. "My friend is Mr Leonard Train."

"Really! I think I have met him. His father made a fortune out of mustard, or coke, or something horrid. What was he doing there?"

"Looking for characters for a book."

"Oh!" Mrs Ward opened her eyes. "Did he find any?"

"I believe so. But he has left the house now."

"I should think every one would leave it after the murder," said Mrs Ward. "Dorothy will be down soon, but meantime tell me the whole thing from your own clever point of view."

She was so pertinacious that Brendon had reluctantly to yield. He detailed events as they had been reported by the press, but concerning the confidence of Leonard he kept silent. Mrs Ward expressed her disappointment when he finished. "You tell me nothing new."

"I warned you that I would not," replied Brendon, wondering at her petulant speech.

"But surely you can throw some light on the matter?" said Mrs Ward.

Brendon shook his head. "I fear not. I went to bed at eleven and slept soundly until I was awakened by the clamor."

Mrs Ward thought for a moment. "Does Mr Train know anything?"

"Nothing more than I have told you," declared Brendon, uncomfortably. He disliked deviating from the truth even in the smallest particular, but he dare not risk the story of his birth becoming public property. It was strange, he thought, that

Mrs Ward should take such a profound interest in this case. He had never before heard her talk on such a subject. To add to his perplexity, he saw that, in spite of her rouge, in spite of the shaded windows, she looked haggard. Yet it was impossible that she could be connected with the matter in any way. He ventured a leading question. "Why are you so anxious to know about this case?"

Mrs Ward's reply rather astonished him. "I am not blind," she said quietly, "and I know well enough that you admire my daughter. You are poor, you are unknown, and should Dorothy marry you she would make a very bad match."

"I am aware of that," began George, "but——"

"Wait," cried Mrs Ward, raising her hand, "I have not yet done. Notwithstanding all these disadvantages, I made up my mind to place no bar to your union with my daughter, as she seems to like you——"

"She loves me, Mrs Ward."

"Nonsense. Dorothy is too young to know the meaning of the word. I say she likes you, so we can let it stand at that. But in spite of your poverty and obscurity——" Brendon winced, for Mrs Ward's tone was insolent in the extreme—"I am not willing that you should marry Dorothy, unless——" She hesitated.

"Unless?" queried George, looking steadily at her.

"Now we come to the point. Unless your character is above suspicion."

"What do you mean?"

"You know well enough. Here you go to a low house, and while you are there the mistress of it is murdered."

George rose with some indignation. "Good heavens, Mrs Ward, you don't suspect me!" he cried.

"Oh, dear, no. But it would be unpleasant for my daughter to have a husband mixed up with such a shady affair."

"I am not mixed up with it, Mrs Ward."

"It's unpleasant," said Mrs Ward, willfully holding to her opinion. "I don't like it. Find out who killed that woman and I say nothing. But until you do find out, and until the assassin is brought to justice, I must ask you to discontinue your visits to Dorothy."

Brendon saw that she was simply making an excuse to rid herself of his presence so as to leave the way clear for Walter Vane. But he was too strong a man to be foiled in this way, and speedily made up his mind how to act. "Shall we leave the matter to Miss Ward?"

"That means you wish to see her," said the mother cleverly. "Oh, well, there is no reason why you should not. But it will be for the last time, remember. Your character must bear inspection."

"I think it does," cried George, rather nettled.

Mrs Ward, who by this time was nearly at the door, turned lightly and replied, in her most kittenish way, "Ah, my dear Mr Brendon, I know more than you think. Lola Velez—"

"Lola Velez." George looked and felt uneasy.

"You change color. Oh, I have heard all about you and that dancer."

"I assure you that my connection with that lady is perfectly innocent."

Mrs Ward scoffed. "Lady!" she said, sneering. "What next? However, I do not wish to hear the particulars. Such creatures are nothing to me. And if you clear yourself of this very shady business in Amelia Square by discovering the true assassin, I shall overlook Lola Velez."

"There is no need to overlook her or me."

"I think there is," said Mrs Ward, frigidly, and



with a wave of her slim hand. "There is no more to be said, Mr Brendon. You know my decision, and as Dorothy's mother I have some power, I hope. Now I will send her to you, and you can say what you like—in fact, you can communicate to her the state of my feelings. But," added Mrs Ward, shooting a Parthian arrow, "I should not mention Lola Velez if I were you. Good-by, I shall not see you for many a long day, I expect."

"And hope," said Brendon, much mortified.

"And hope," replied Mrs Ward, coolly. "You are the last man in the world I should like for my son-in-law. Marry that dancer," and with a shrill, unpleasant laugh Mrs Ward vanished.

Brendon paced the room, waiting for Dorothy. How Mrs Ward had learned of his connection with Lola Velez he could not understand. Brendon was perfectly innocent, and what he had done for the dancer was dictated by pure kindness. But even if he explained the whole circumstances of his meeting and of his philanthropy to Dorothy, she was a woman, when all was said and done, and might not believe him. On the whole, he decided to take Mrs Ward's advice and hold his tongue on the subject of the dancer. On some future occasion he might be able to explain, and at the present moment he had the satisfaction of knowing that his conscience was clear. He had just arrived at this decision when Dorothy entered the room. The next moment she was in his arms, and the two entered Paradise at once.

"My dearest, I am so glad to see you," said Dorothy in her soft voice as they sat down. "I wrote, but you did not come."

"I was engaged, darling."

Dorothy nodded. "I know, at the inquest which was held on that poor creature."

"Why do you take an interest in the case, Dorothy?"

"Oh, because you went to stop at the house, and it was so strange that she should have died on that very night."

"So your mother says," said George, uncomfortably. "I really think she believes that I have something to do with the matter."

"Oh, that's nonsense," said Dorothy, serenely; "but mother does not like you very much, George, and——"

"She hates me, you mean."

"Well," responded Miss Ward, candidly, "if you ask me to tell the truth, I think she does. But you know what my mother is. I—no, if I cannot say good of her, let me at least say nothing bad. But I love you, George, you know that."

"My own heart," and Brendon took her in his strong arms, thanking God for the gift of so steadfast a heart. For a few minutes silence reigned, and the lovers looked at one another with fond affection.

Dorothy was tall and slim and dark, with a Spanish face of that delicate, high-bred cast which is seen to perfection among the women of Andalusia. Judging by her large black eyes, and the serious expression of her lips, Dorothy Ward might have had Moorish blood in her veins. Perhaps she had, as one of her father's ancestors, when ambassador to Madrid in the reign of the first James, had brought back with him a Spanish wife. And Dorothy inherited all the Iberian beauty of that lady. She should have been called Inez, or Paquita, for the purely English name of Dorothy suited her badly. That is a milkmaid's name, and Miss Ward was more of the court than of the pasture.

Her dark beauty contrasted well with the fair

comeliness of George Brendon, and seated side by side on the sofa they looked an extremely handsome couple. Certainly they might have appeared happier, for Dorothy was downcast, and in Brendon's blue eyes there lurked a worried look. He was wondering how he could communicate Mrs Ward's decision to the girl. Dorothy looked at him and smiled.

"A penny for your thoughts, George," she said, taking his hand.

"I'll sell them as bankrupt stock," said Brendon, drawing her closer, and then he took his courage in both hands for the necessary confession. "This may be my last visit, Dorothy," he said.

She looked at him in surprise. "Why do you say that?"

"Your mother——"

"Oh, never mind my mother," broke in the girl, petulantly. "I know she objects to our marriage, so——"

"On the contrary, she told me that she would not object if I could clear myself of complicity in this crime."

"George! Did she accuse you of——"

"Not in so many words," interrupted the lover, "but I saw very plainly what she meant. The fact that I slept in that house on the night Mrs Jersey was murdered is to her mind a proof that I have something to do with the matter."

"But you can prove conclusively that you have not," insisted Dorothy.

"Certainly. Mr Train, with whom I was stopping, can prove that I did not leave my room. The key of the sitting-room door was in his possession, and to get out I should have had to make use of him." George paused and thought for a moment. "But there is one thing——"

"What is it?" asked Dorothy, seeing that he hesitated.

"I don't know if I ought to tell you."

"Whatever concerns you concerns me," she said, pressing his hand to her heart. "You know that I love you as dearly as you love me, and nothing you tell me shall ever part us."

"Oh, I don't think what I am about to say will have that effect," was Brendon's reply, "but I have a confession to make about my—my birth."

Dorothy looked at him in amazement. "About your birth?" she repeated.

"Yes. You may as well know all, and I know you will not betray me, even to your mother."

"To her least of all," said Dorothy, vehemently. "Tell me quick."

Encouraged by her faith, and by the tender clasp of her hand, George related to her the story of his birth and of his connection with Lord Derrington. Also he detailed how he had gone to seek Mrs Jersey, and how she had been murdered before he could get the truth out of her. "Or even see her," finished George. "And now you know, dearest, why I do not wish you to repeat this story. If your mother knew it she might think—think—well, she certainly would not let you marry me."

"She has made her mind up already so far as that is concerned," said Dorothy, quickly. "It is Mr Vane whom she wishes me to marry."

"My cousin, although he does not know it," said George, quietly; "but I want your advice, Dorothy, and will be guided by it. What shall I do? You see, now that Mrs Jersey is dead there is no chance of getting at the truth."

"Why not advertise?"

"I have tried that for some months in every country paper in the kingdom, but there has been no

response. My father and mother must have been married in some out-of-the-way village, in some lonely church. The parson and those who know about the marriage may be dead. In fact, it is extremely probable that they are. Mrs Jersey was present as my mother's maid, and she might have been able to tell me where the church is. I only want to find the register of the marriage and get the certificate. Then I shall see Lord Derrington and insist on my rights being recognized. He can't leave either the title or the money away from me."

"Have you seen him at all yet?"

"Not to speak to. But he was pointed out to me. I hear he is an old tyrant."

Dorothy shuddered. "A most terrible old man. He always reminds me of one of those Italian despots. There is nothing he would not do provided that the law could not touch him."

"And I dare say, from your description, the things he desires to do are of the kind that the law would make him answerable for."

"George," said Dorothy, after a pause, "do you think he has anything to do with this murder?"

Brendon turned slightly pale and set his lips firmly. "No, dearest," was his reply, but delivered with some uncertainty. "He does not know—at all events from me—that I am seeking for a restitution of my rights, and therefore would have no reason to rid himself of this woman. Besides, I don't know if he is aware of her existence."

It will be seen that Brendon was ignorant that Lord Derrington was the owner of the Jersey mansion and had allowed Madame an annuity. Had he known this much he might have been able to shape his course better; but, being in the dark, he had to do the best he could with Dorothy's assistance. He had asked for her advice and she gave it.

"George, I should get back my birthright if I were you."

"But I may be dragged into this murder case."

"No. Mr Train can save you from being accused of that. It is only right that you should take your proper position in society. You know I would marry you as you are, and defy my mother and the world. But you owe it to your dead mother and to yourself to show that you have the right to your father's name."

"In that case I shall do what you advise," cried George, taking heart from her firm tone; "and the first thing I shall do will be to see Mr Ireland."

"Who is he, George?"

"My guardian. He took charge of me after my grandfather Lockwood died, and it was by his advice that I changed my name to baffle the inquiries of Lord Derrington. He will know all about the marriage, and may be able to indicate where my parents went when they eloped. I have never asked him for a detailed statement, but I shall do so now. Once I find a clew, I shall not rest until I prove my legitimacy. For your sake, my dear—for your sake," and he kissed her.

"And for your own," said Dorothy, as they rose. "I shall say nothing to my mother or to any one, George. But tell me all that you do."

"I shall make a regular report," replied Brendon, "but we will probably have to meet elsewhere, as your mother has asked me to discontinue my visits here."

"I shall speak to her," said Dorothy, angrily.

"No. Do not do that. She will only grow angry and make things harder for you, my own heart. Good-by, and God bless you."

They kissed and parted at the door. Brendon was just stepping out into the hall when a thought

occurred to him. He re-entered and closed the door. "Dorothy," he asked, in a low whisper, "why did you give me the yellow holly on that night?"

She looked surprised. "It was to please you," she said softly; "and to tell you the truth, George, I thought that the holly was a proof that my mother was relenting toward you."

"How do you mean, Dorothy?"

"It was my mother who gave me the holly," she explained. "I came from the Park and told her you were going to stop with Mr Train, and that she could set her mind at rest, as I should not see you for a few days. She seemed pleased, and taking the yellow holly from a vase in her boudoir she gave me a sprig, saying that I could give it to you for consolation."

"Did you tell her that you had fastened it in my coat?"

"Yes. But she only laughed, and said it would please you. Why do you ask me this, George?"

"There is no reason for my asking," he replied, suppressing the truth, "but yellow holly is rare."

"Very rare. I don't know where my mother got the sprig."

After this they parted, and Brendon walked thoughtfully away. Mrs Jersey had been startled by the sight of the holly. Mrs Ward had given the sprig to Dorothy, who had presented it to him. He asked himself if there was a reason for Mrs Ward's action.

## CHAPTER VI

### WHAT MR IRELAND KNEW

**A**FTER his disagreeable experience in the Bloomsbury district, Brendon was not very anxious to go there again, but it was necessary that he should do so if he wanted to see his guardian. From force of habit he still continued to call him so, although Mr Ireland had long since ceased to act in that capacity. George had a sincere respect for him, and frequently paid him a visit. Usually it was one of ceremony or of enjoyment, but on this occasion the young man went in search of knowledge.

Ireland was an eccentric character who collected (of all things) bill-posters. Most collectors turn their attention to stamps, to snuff-boxes, to autographs, and such-like trifles; but Mr Ireland hunted for those gigantic and gaudy pictures which make gay the thoroughfares of the city. When George entered the dull old house, in an equally dull Bloomsbury street, he found the hall decorated with an immense advertisement of Bovril. Proceeding upstairs he was met on the landing by the famous cats who serve to draw attention to Nestlé's Milk, and finally entered a large room on the first floor, where Mr Ireland sat at his desk surrounded by a perfect art-gallery. Here was Fry's Chocolate; there the Magic Carpet of Cook, and the wall opposite to the three windows looking out onto the street was plastered with theatrical advertisements, more or less crude in color and out of drawing. These were not modern,



but had been acquired by Ireland in the dark ages when street art was in its infancy. The effect of the whole was bizarre and striking, but George was too used to the spectacle to pay much attention to the gallery.

The room was very bare, so as to give space for the collection. Mr Ireland sat at a mahogany desk in the center, which was placed on a square of carpet. Beside this desk stood a chair, and in one corner of the room was a safe painted green. Other furniture there was none, and what with the huge pictures, the bare floor, and the want of curtains to the windows the effect was comfortless and dreary, but Mr Ireland did not seem to mind in the least.

He was a tall old man with rather long white hair and a clean-shaven, benign face. His unusual height did away with the impression of his excessive stoutness, for he appeared to be as fat as Daniel Lambert. George often wondered at his size, considering that the man ate comparatively little. Mr Ireland was dressed in glossy broadcloth scrupulously brushed, and wore an old-fashioned Gladstone collar. He had mild blue eyes, rather watery, and a large mouth with full red lips. This hint of sensuality was contradicted by the serenity and pallor of his face, and by his life, which was as correct as his dress and as methodical as his hours.

Never was there so methodical a man. He lived by the clock, and with him one day exactly resembled another. He rose at a certain hour and retired precisely when the hand on the clock indicated another. His meals were always regular, and he had stated hours for walking, when he went out, whether it was wet or fine, sunny or foggy. The man was like a machine, and George, when living with him in his early days, had often found these restrictions

irksome. It was one o'clock when Brendon called, and Mr Ireland had just finished his luncheon. At two precisely he would leave the house for his one hour's constitutional. Brendon was aware of this, and had timed his visit accordingly. Nevertheless, Ireland looked at his watch and mentioned the fact.

"I can only give you an hour, George," he said. "You know my habits."

"An hour will be sufficient," replied Brendon, taking the one chair. "You are not looking very well, sir," he added, noting the fagged air of the old man.

"I have not been sleeping so soundly as usual," rejoined Ireland, producing a box of cigars and passing them. "At my age, and I am now seventy-five, I can't be expected to enjoy my bed so much as a young person. Take a cigar."

"The old brand," said Brendon, selecting one.

"I never vary," replied his guardian, gravely. "Pass that matchbox, George. Have you a light? Good. Now we can talk for the next fifty-five minutes. What is it?"

As time was short, and Mr Ireland would be sure to terminate the interview exactly at the stated hour, George plunged immediately into the business which had brought him hither. "I wish to hear the story of my parents," he said deliberately.

The cigar fell from the fat fingers of Ireland, and he stared in amazement at the young man. "It is rather late in the day for that, is it not?" he asked, picking up the cigar and recovering himself.

"Better late than never," quoted George, puffing a cloud of smoke.

"A proverb is no answer," said Ireland, testily.

"Then, if you wish to know, sir, I am in love."

"That is no answer, either."

"It will lead to a very explicit answer," rejoined

the young man, coolly. "Love leads to marriage, and in my case marriage cannot take place unless I know that I am legitimate."

"Of course you are. I have always maintained that you are."

"What proof have you?" asked George, eagerly.

Ireland hesitated and wiped his mouth in quite an unnecessary manner with a red silk handkerchief. "Your father always declared that Miss Lockwood was his lawful wife, and treated her with every respect."

"Did my father ever tell you where the marriage was celebrated?"

"No; I never asked, nor did your grandfather Lockwood. It was not till after your mother's death that Lord Derrington denied the marriage. Then Mr Vane was in Italy and never troubled about the matter."

"He should have done so, for my sake," said George, indignantly.

"Certainly, and I urged him to do so," said Mr Ireland, heavily. "I was in Italy at the time, and you were only an infant in arms."

"Who was my nurse then?"

"Jane Fraser—the Scotch nurse who afterward brought you to your grandfather Lockwood when Mr Vane was murdered."

"Do you remember the other nurse—the first one I had?"

Mr Ireland grew indignant, and puffed angrily at his cigar. "I do, indeed," he said wrathfully, "a vulgar, forward hussy. She was not bad-looking, either, and set up for being a lady." Here he began to laugh. "Would you believe it, George, my boy, she was in love with your father, and showed it so plainly that he was obliged to get rid of her?"

"What was her name?"

“Eliza Stokes. And she was handsome in a bouncing way.”

“What became of her?”

“I can’t tell you,” said Ireland, with sudden reserve.

“Did you see her after she was dismissed?”

Ireland turned his cigar slowly and did not look at George when he replied. “Yes, I did. When and where it does not matter.”

“But it does matter—to me!” cried Brendon, anxiously. “It is to know about her that I came here to see you to-day.”

“I thought you came about your birth,” said Ireland, sharply.

“That among other things.”

The old man looked down again and appeared to be in deep thought. He was turning over in his own mind how much or how little he should tell George. And the young man looked at him anxiously. Much depended upon the speech of Mr Ireland. At last the silence was broken, and by a most unexpected remark. “I loved your mother,” said Ireland.

“I never knew that,” said Brendon, softly, for he saw that the man was moved at the recollection of some early romance.

“I never spoke of it before,” was the reply, and Ireland laid down his cigar to speak the more freely. “Yes, I loved Rosina Lockwood with all my heart and soul. I was not bad-looking in those days, George, and I had a good income, but she preferred that scamp,” and he struck his hand heavily on the table, with glowing eyes.

“You are talking of my father, sir,” said Brendon, stiffly.

“I ask your pardon. But if you wish me to tell the story of that most unfortunate affair you can-

not hope that I shall keep my temper. I was very badly treated by—well—” with a glance at George, Ireland nodded—“let the dead rest in peace.”

“I think it will be as well,” said Brendon, coldly.

Ireland again struck the table. His pallid skin became a deep crimson, and his eyes flashed. George rose in alarm, for the old man struggled to speak with such an obvious effort that he thought an apoplectic fit would end the conversation. He hastily poured out a glass of water and begged Ireland to loosen his neckcloth. But the man shook his head, and going to one of the windows opened it. For a few moments he inhaled the air, and returned to his seat more composed. “I beg your pardon, George,” he gasped, when he recovered his voice, “but if you wish me to tell you anything you must not speak to me like that. I have a bad temper.”

“I never knew that,” said Brendon, in a soothing tone. “You were always kind to me.”

“I have a superlatively bad temper,” repeated Ireland, “but you were her child. How could I be angry with her child? Wait! Wait, I shall tell you all I can. Give me a few moments.”

He was so moved with emotion, and with the recollection of the past, that he buried his head in his arms, which were resting on the table. Brendon, respecting this feeling, walked to the end of the room and stared at a picture which represented a star of the ballet. But he did not see the saucy face, the twirling skirts. He was thinking how strange it was that Ireland should never have confessed this love before. Certainly he had never displayed such emotion. A change had come over the man, whereby he more plainly revealed his feelings than he was wont to do. George put this down to old age, and to less self-control consequent on the same. Shortly he heard Ireland calling to him, and

returned to his seat to find the old man smoking quietly and rather ashamed of his outbreak. "But you shall see no more of that," he said.

"I am sorry to be obliged to ask you for a story of the past," said Brendon, apologetically, "but it means so much to me."

"I'll tell you all I can," said Ireland, taking no notice of the apology, but looking at the ash on his cigar. He paused for a moment to collect his thoughts, and then began abruptly. "I first met your mother at her father's house in Amelia Square, where I went to take lessons in singing. Lockwood was famous for his method in those days, and his fame was increased by the appearance of your mother, Rosina, at many concerts. She was a most beautiful creature, and was as much admired for her beauty as for her voice. Ah! what a voice. It was like the trill of a lark, flexible and silvery, and with an immense range. She was quite the rage for a season, and was called the English Jenny Lind. Many offers were made to her for the operatic stage. I dare say she would have accepted in the end had she not met with Percy Vane, and he—" Ireland's hand clenched.

"My father," said George, willfully disregarding this sign of temper, "how did he meet her?"

"He saw her at a concert and fell in love with her. Then he came to take singing-lessons, with the voice of a frog. Bah! it was a mere blind. It was Rosina Lockwood he was after. I saw it—oh, yes! The eyes of love are keen, and, although Rosina would not waste a look on me, I watched her every action. Many a night have I paced Amelia Square watching her window. When she sang I was entranced, when she smiled—" Here the old man shook his head and made an effort to recover himself.

Brendon saw that the recital was painful to him, and but that he was so anxious to get at the proofs of his birth would have asked him to desist. But there was too much at stake for such consideration to be shown. "Go on," he said softly, and Ireland resumed.

"Percy Vane was a handsome man, and rich. I warned Lockwood that he was in love with Rosina, but the old man would not heed. He was flattered by the attention Rosina received. All through that season Vane was in attendance on Rosina. At the end of it he eloped with her—yes. He met her outside St James's Hall and they eloped."

"Where did they go to?" asked Brendon, eagerly.

"That I cannot say. Rosina wrote three weeks afterward from Paris, signing herself Vane, and stating that she was the wife of Percy."

"Was my grandfather angry?"

"Yes and no. He was angry that he should have lost her, for she was of use to him as an advertisement of his method of singing, and also she earned a great deal of money. The house in Amelia Square was large and required a good deal to keep it up. Besides, Anthony Lockwood was extravagant. That was why you were left so badly off."

Brendon shrugged his shoulders. "It was good of my grandfather to leave me anything," he said, "but in what way was my—Mr Lockwood, pleased? You hinted that he was not quite angry."

"Well," said Ireland, slowly twirling the cigar in his fingers, "you see he was flattered that his daughter should have married into the aristocracy."

"Then there was no question of the marriage, then?"

"No. Lord Derrington said nothing till your mother was dead, and even then he said very little. It was when Vane was murdered at San Remo that

he first decisively asserted that no marriage had taken place. He did so because Lockwood insisted that Derrington should acknowledge you as the heir. He refused to do so, and said that his second son was the heir."

"That is Walter Vane's father?"

"Exactly. And now the father is dead, Walter Vane stands in your shoes. I wish you could prove the marriage, my boy," said Ireland, shaking his head, "but it will be a difficult task."

"I don't care how difficult it is," replied Brendon, resolutely. "I am determined to learn the truth."

"Who is the lady?" asked Ireland.

"Miss Dorothy Ward. You don't know anything of her."

Ireland shook his head. "I left the adoration of the aristocracy to Lockwood," he said, with something like a sneer, "but that's neither here nor there, my boy. To make a long story short, I met your mother in Paris, and shortly afterward she died, giving birth to you. Eliza Stokes was with her when she died, and you were given into the charge of that woman. Your mother was buried in Père la Chaise. Vane put up a stone to her—oh! he behaved very well, I don't deny that," added Ireland, but with a dark face; "he was really fond of her. And I suppose there was a marriage."

"Did my mother ever say anything about it?"

"Never. You asked me that before. It was an accepted fact. After the death of Rosina her husband went to Italy. I was there, too, and it was at Milan that the episode occurred which led to the dismissal of Eliza Stokes."

"What was that?"

"Why, there was a young English waiter, quite a boy he was, who fell in love with Eliza when she was taking charge of you at the Hôtel de Ville. She



refused to marry him and hinted that she loved your father. Vane heard of this and taxed her with impertinence. The end of it was that Eliza said too much and was dismissed. And Jane Fraser was sent from England by Vane's mother to nurse you. That looks as though Lady Derrington believed in the marriage."

"It does," admitted Brendon, hopefully. "She would not have sent a nurse had anything been wrong. On the other hand, if she had been quite certain about the marriage she might have offered to take charge of me."

"She did, I believe, but your father was so fond of you—for your mother's sake—that he could scarcely bear you out of his sight. However, Eliza went, and Jane came, and then your father went to San Remo. You were then two years of age."

"Did not my father return to England during all that time?"

"No. When he left England with your mother he never returned. She died in Paris, and, with you in charge of a nurse, Vane wandered about the Continent. I was twice in Italy and saw him—the second time it was at San Remo."

"If you disliked my father so much, why did you seek him out?"

"To see you, George. You were her child, and I loved Rosina so dearly." Ireland stopped, gulped down his emotion, and proceeded more calmly: "Yes, I was at San Remo when your father was murdered."

"You never told me that before," said Brendon.

"I never told you anything before," replied Ireland, dryly. "And I should not tell you now, but that my health is getting so bad that I may not live long. I have an incurable disease, which will sooner or later carry me off—no, I don't want sym-

pathy. Let me finish the story and then we need not refer to it again. I had intended to leave a written statement behind me for you, George, but this is better, as you can ask me questions about what you do not understand."

"I understand all so far," said George, thoughtfully. "But about this murder, Mr Ireland? Who killed my father?"

"That was never discovered. He went to a masked ball and was seen leaving the room in the company of a blue domino. His body was found on the stones of the beach early next morning. He had been stabbed to the heart."

"With a stiletto?" asked Brendon, recollecting the manner of Mrs Jersey's death.

"Yes. Hence it was supposed that he had been stabbed by some jealous Italian, who had followed him and the lady. But the truth was never known. I think myself that Vane was murdered on the parade and that his body was thrown over onto the beach. The man who killed him must then have taken away the lady."

"Who was the lady—the blue domino?"

"No one ever learned. She was cloaked and masked. Your father was a gay man, George, and it was rumored that he was in love with the wife of a certain officer. It might be that the husband—but of course I cannot say. The blue domino may not have been the woman in question. The whole thing is a mystery. Your father's body was taken to England, and as Lord Derrington refused to acknowledge the marriage, Lockwood took charge of you."

"I remember, and Jane Fraser was my nurse for many years. She was at San Remo when the murder took place?"

"Yes, and so was Eliza Stokes."

"What was she doing there?"

"Well, this waiter—by the way, his name was George also, although you were called after Lockwood's father—well, George Rates, seeing that Eliza was dismissed, got her a situation at a hotel in San Remo. He came there also during the season, and I believe the two married. But Eliza Stokes never came near your father."

"What became of her afterward?"

Ireland hesitated. "I can't say," he said.

"But I can," observed George, coolly. "She was murdered the other day at the Amelia Square house as Mrs Jersey."

"I heard of that crime. But how do you identify Eliza Stokes with Mrs Jersey?"

"My old nurse, Jane Fraser, told me. When I began these inquiries I looked up Jane, who now lives in a little Essex village. She told me all she could, which was not much. But she stated that when here one day, on a visit to you, she had met Eliza Stokes and in spite of her age and gray hairs she had recognized her. Eliza told her that she was called Mrs Jersey and had taken a boarding-house in Amelia Square. I then determined to speak to Mrs Jersey, whom I thought might have been present at the marriage, or at all events might know where it had been celebrated."

"It is probable she did," said Ireland, "as she was with your mother as maid when the elopement took place. Did you see Mrs Jersey, or Eliza Stokes as I still regard her?"

"I saw her, but she was murdered before I could manage to speak to her on the subject. Did you know——"

"I know that Eliza Stokes had changed her name to Mrs Jersey and was in Amelia Square," said Ireland, "but I only learned this the other day."

"Who told you?"

"A woman called Miss Bull," said Ireland.

"Miss Bull," repeated George. "I remember, that was the boarder who foretold a violent death to Mrs Jersey. But you read about that in the papers."

Ireland nodded. "I did," he said; "and I also saw that you were in the house when Mrs Jersey was murdered. You were a witness."

"I can tell you about that. I——"

"There is no need to tell me. I have not the time." Ireland looked at his watch. "In ten minutes I leave for my walk."

George remonstrated. "But this is so important."

"Not so important as my health. I can give you only the ten minutes, George. This Miss Bull called to ask me about the lease of the house to Mrs Jersey. I knew nothing about that. When Lockwood died I sold the house to Lord Derrington——"

"What—to my grandfather?"

"Yes. But had I known he was the purchaser I should not have let him had it. He bought it through an agent. Since then I heard nothing more about the house. I did not even know it was a boarding-establishment until it appeared as such in the papers the other day. I wondered what you were doing at the inquest——"

"I can explain."

Ireland held up his hand. "I need no explanation. I know that Mrs Jersey was really Eliza Stokes. I gathered that from the description given by Miss Bull in the course of our conversation. My suspicions were aroused by the fact that Lord Derrington had leased the Amelia Square house to Mrs Jersey."

"Why did he do that?" George spoke more to himself than to Ireland.

"Well," said the old man rising, "it is my belief

that Lord Derrington knows there was a marriage, and assisted Mrs Jersey so that she should hold her tongue. Now there is no more time. I must go out," and Ireland walked to the door.

George followed, knowing it was vain to attempt to turn him from his purpose, as the old man was most obstinate. "One moment," he said, on the doorstep; "this blue domino connected with my father's murder—was she never traced?"

"No. There was no means of tracing her. Except that she wore a piece of holly she carried no distinguishing mark."

"Holly!" cried George, astounded. "Yellow holly?"

"Yes. I don't know how you come to mention it, but the holly worn by the blue domino with whom your father went away had yellow berries."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE RED MAN

**A**S Brendon was in the neighborhood of Amelia Square he paid a visit to the boarding-house. Having learned from Ireland that Miss Bull had informed him how Lord Derrington was connected with the late Mrs Jersey, George thought it just as well that she should be questioned. Certainly Miss Bull, who appeared to be a dour and secretive sort of person, might not speak. On the other hand, if he could induce her to be frank he might learn from her—presuming she knew—the reason why Lord Derrington had leased the Amelia Square house to Mrs Jersey. It was a forlorn hope, but Brendon was so eager to learn the truth that he clutched even at this straw. Therefore, on leaving Ireland, he turned his steps in the direction of the boarding-house. Much as he disliked entering it again, it was necessary that he should do so.

On his way Brendon meditated on Ireland's remarks about the holly. He remembered the agitation of Mrs Jersey when she saw the sprig in his coat. She had been at San Remo when his father was stabbed, and Ireland had mentioned that the woman with whom the deceased man had left the ballroom wore a sprig of yellow holly. Had the berries been red, George might not have thought so much of the matter; but yellow holly is comparatively rare, and evidently Mrs Jersey's alarm had

been caused by her recollection of the murder. The sight of the holly had revived her memory.

"I wonder if she had anything to do with the murder," mused George as he turned into Amelia Square. "Could she have been the woman in the blue domino? Certainly she was a servant and my father would have had nothing to do with her. But at the ball she would wear a domino and be closely masked. But even so, by what means could she have induced my father to leave the room with her? I don't suppose she murdered him herself, for she had no reason to do so, unless it was jealousy, which for a woman in her position was absurd. Bah! I am making a mountain out of a mole-hill. Eliza Stokes probably never went to the ball and had nothing to do with the blue domino or with the matter of the crime. From what Ireland says, however, a piece of yellow holly was mentioned in connection with the murder, and Mrs Jersey, then Eliza Stokes, probably heard of it. That was why she shivered and turned pale when she saw the sprig in my coat."

Having thus decided the question, though not in a very satisfactory way, George rang the bell and was admitted into the house by Jarvey. The boy welcomed him with a grin, as George had given him half-a-crown when he left the mansion after the inquest. "Miss Bull, sir, yes, sir," said Jarvey, "step this way," and he introduced Mr Brendon into the sitting-room in which the murder had taken place. It was empty, but Jarvey departed immediately to fetch Miss Bull.

George knew the room well. It had been used by his grandfather as a breakfast-room, and many a meal had he enjoyed at that very table. As the furniture had been sold to Lord Derrington, together with the house, the table was the very article

of furniture at which Mrs Jersey had been stabbed when seated. Brendon looked from the table to the door, and wondered if the assassin had entered stealthily, with a bared weapon, and had stabbed the wretched woman before she had time to turn her head. But on second thoughts he was inclined to think that the assassin had been in friendly conversation with Mrs Jersey before inflicting the fatal stroke. Even in the short distance between table and door Mrs Jersey would have had time to spring to her feet and give the alarm. "No," thought George, as he seated himself, "what I said to Train is correct. The assassin engaged Mrs Jersey in friendly conversation, and then watched for an opportunity to strike from behind."

He would have continued trying to puzzle out the circumstances of the crime but that Miss Bull entered, accompanied by Margery. The little old maid looked whiter and more haggard than ever, but her eyes gleamed brightly, and she seemed to be in perfect health. Margery, now being the nominal head of the house, appeared more important, but she kept her eyes on Miss Bull's face, and in all things took her orders from this superior being. Miss Bull was a despot, although kindly enough, and Margery was her slave.

"How are you, Mr Brendon?" said Miss Bull, smiling in her prim way, but without offering her hand. "I did not expect to see you again."

"Why not?" asked George, quickly.

Miss Bull shrugged her thin shoulders and fastened her beady eyes on his face. "Many of the boarders left on account of Madame's murder, so I thought you had done the same."

"I was only a visitor, Miss Bull. Had I been a boarder I should not have left. The murder did not scare me."



"No," replied Miss Bull, indifferently, "I don't suppose it did. I only talked for the sake of talking."

Brendon knew this was untrue, as Miss Bull was not a woman to waste words. Besides, the old maid's eyes were fixed with a certain amount of curiosity on his face, and he could not conceive why this was so. He was rather embarrassed how to begin the conversation, especially as Margery was present. Something of this showed itself in his manner, for Miss Bull drew Margery's hand within her own and nodded affably. "Miss Watson is the head of the house," she said. "Do you come to see her or me, Mr Brendon?"

"I come to see you," said George, hoping she would send the inconvenient third away. But she did nothing of the sort.

"In that case Margery can stop as my friend, Mr Brendon. Anything you say before her will go no further. She keeps my secrets."

"Always! always!" cried Margery, her eyes on the old maid. "I would rather die than reveal your secrets, Miss Bull."

"Rather tragic, my dear, rather tragic," replied the elder, patting the hand she held. "I have really no secrets worth revealing. A lonely old woman, Mr Brendon, solaced by the friendship and devotion of this lonely girl."

Margery, who had flushed at the rebuke, stopped and kissed the old maid's hand. Miss Bull patted her head and turned cheerfully to her visitor. "Yes, Mr Brendon?" she said in an interrogative manner. Again George felt awkward, but judged it best to plunge into the middle of the matter and get it over as soon as possible. "You called to see a certain Mr Ireland," he said, "about the lease of this house. I have to come to ask you why you did so."

Miss Bull stopped patting Margery's hand and her lips tightened. "I don't see what business that is of yours," she said tartly.

"On the face of it, Miss Bull, I admit that the question sounds impertinent. But I am anxious to learn something about Mrs Jersey's early life, and since you know something——"

"I know nothing," interrupted Miss Bull, quickly, "absolutely nothing. I came here as a boarder many years ago, and, as is my custom, I kept myself to myself. Madame and I did not get on well together. She was not a lady."

"Do you know what she was?" asked Brendon, shrewdly.

"I have already said that I know nothing," replied Miss Bull, coldly.

Evidently it was impossible to learn anything from so secretive a woman. Nevertheless, George tried another tack. "Do you know if Mrs Jersey left any writings behind her?"

He asked this because it struck him that Mrs Jersey might have been tempted to write out her relations with the Vane family. It was apparent that Lord Derrington had given her a lease of the house to silence her about the possible marriage, so for the sake of her niece Mrs Jersey might have left some confession which would secure its renewal. And that the lease had been renewed was evident from the fact that the boarding-house was still being carried on in the old way, and by the niece.

Miss Bull did not reply to this question herself. "That is not my business," she said; "Miss Watson took possession of her aunt's papers."

"They were in a green box," said Margery, artlessly.

"What did they consist of?" asked Brendon.

"You need not answer that question, Margery,"

said Miss Bull, quickly, and from that moment, Margery preserved a lumpish silence. George rose in despair.

"You will not help me," he said, taking up his hat.

"So far as I can see there is no reason why we should help you," was Miss Bull's reply, and she rose in her turn.

Brendon saw nothing for it but to go, yet he hesitated to abandon the chance of learning something from Miss Bull. He stared at her pinched, white face and wondered if it would be any good appealing to that love of romance which is inherent in the heart of every woman. Old and withered as Miss Bull was, she might soften under the influence of a love-tale. Brendon disliked telling his business to strangers, especially anything regarding Dorothy, whom he looked upon as a sacred vestal not to be lightly mentioned. However, so much was at stake that he determined to speak openly, on the bare chance of Miss Bull yielding. But he could not speak in the presence of the girl Margery. She was such a sullen animal that to mention his love in her presence would be like casting pearls before swine. He therefore turned to Miss Bull, who stood with folded hands, eyeing him frigidly. "If I could see you alone," said Brendon.

Miss Bull cast a shrewd glance at him, rapidly made up her mind and told Margery to go. The girl looked at him tigerishly, as she was evidently jealous, and sulkily withdrew. When the door was closed Brendon resumed his seat, but Miss Bull remained standing. This was not a good sign; but George was now committed to a certain course and had to follow it.

"Miss Bull," he said deliberately, "what I am about to tell you, being my own private business, I must ask you to keep to yourself."

"I don't want to hear it," said Miss Bull. "I never care for other people's secrets."

"This is not a secret, Miss Bull. It is merely that I am engaged to be married."

"Indeed, and what interest can that have for me, Mr Brendon?"

"This much. You are a woman and must feel interested to a certain extent in a love romance. I am aware that I am appealing to you in a way which you may regard as foolish, but I am so anxious for certain information, and, from what Mr Ireland said, you alone can give it. To put the thing in a nutshell—I am in love, and you can forward my marriage if you will."

Miss Bull heard him in silence, but as he talked a faint crimson flushed her face and a softer light shone in her hard eyes. She put her hand to her heart, as though she felt a cruel pain, and sank into a chair. Alarmed by her pallor, which had now returned, George would have called for assistance, but she stopped him. "I shall be all right shortly," she muttered in faint tones. "Marriage, love, what have I to do with such things?" She paused, and then continued, her voice gathering strength as she proceeded, "Who is the bride, Mr Brendon?"

"She is not a bride yet; she never may be," replied the young man, gloomily, "for if she does not become my wife she will accept no one else. I can trust her implicitly. Her name is Dorothy Ward."

Miss Bull rose with an ejaculation and her face grew red. "Is her mother the Honorable Mrs Ward who married Lord Ransome's son?"

"Yes. Do you know her?" asked George, surprised at her emotion.

"I have heard of her," replied Miss Bull, resuming her seat with feigned indifference, but with barely

concealed agitation. "Dorothy Ward. A handsome girl. I have seen her in the Park."

"She is as good as she is beautiful," cried Brendon, enthusiastically.

"I'll take your word for that," said Miss Bull in a softer tone. "Mr Brendon, I will help you. Don't ask me why. Perhaps it is on account of your romance; perhaps because—because—" her hand clenched itself and she fought down an outburst—"no matter. I will do what I can to forward the marriage. What do you wish to know?"

"About Mrs Jersey."

"In relation to Lord Derrington?"

"Yes. He was the landlord of this house, I believe."

"He was and is. It was leased to Mrs Jersey, furniture and all, by the year."

"By the year," said Brendon, surprised. "Why not a seven-years' lease in the ordinary way?"

"I cannot say. I am only telling you what Mrs Jersey's lawyer told me. Lord Derrington bought this house from Mr Ireland with the furniture as it stood, and as it stood he gave it to Mrs Jersey. She turned it into a boarding-house some fifteen years ago. I don't think she added or took away any furniture. It is in the same condition as when it left Mr Ireland's hands. And he, I believe, sold it on account of the last owner."

"He did," admitted George. "The last owner was Mr Anthony Lockwood; he was—" George had it in his mind to state that Lockwood was his father. But the time was not yet ripe for such a disclosure, and he said nothing at the moment. "He was a singing-master," he finished rather lamely. "Mr Ireland told me all about him."

"That is all correct, so far as I know, Mr Brendon. I dare say you wish to know why I saw Mr

Ireland. I did so on behalf of Margery Watson, as I wanted the girl to continue the boarding-house. I like the poor creature, and when her aunt died she was left very badly off."

"Didn't Mrs Jersey leave any money?"

"No. She lived principally on an annuity from Lord Derrington."

"Ah!" said Brendon, his suspicions becoming more and more confirmed, "so he allowed her an annuity. Why?"

"I can't tell you that. But with the death of Mrs Jersey the annuity naturally ceased. I asked Mr Ireland about the lease, and then sought out Lord Derrington. I represented to him the position of Margery Watson, and he was good enough to renew the lease in her name, on my security."

"Still by the year?" asked George.

"Still by the year. So now the poor girl can live."

"You are a good woman, Miss Bull, to help her in this way."

"I am not good," cried Miss Bull, vehemently. "God knows I have enough sins to repent of. Don't call me good, Mr Brendon. I am only a desolate old woman who has had a hard life. I should have been married and settled, but—but"— She shook her head and the tears came into her hard eyes. "God help me, I have had sorrows, and will have them till I die."

"That shows you have a good heart," said George, alluding not to her sorrows, but to her actions toward Margery. "Well, Miss Bull—" he rose—"you have told me what I want to know. I hope to make use of it. In return for your confidence I should tell you—"

"Tell me nothing," cried the old maid, quickly. "I don't wish to hear your secrets. The less said the soonest mended. When Miss Ward becomes Mrs

Brendon," she added with a dry smile, "you can send me a piece of wedding cake."

"She will not become Mrs Brendon," said George, shaking his head. "I will be frank with you, Miss Bull. My name is not Brendon."

She rose from her seat and looked at him steadily, perusing every line in his face. "I thought I had seen some one like you before. I see now—now—don't tell me your name is—is—but it's impossible."

"My real name is George Vane. I am Lord Derington's grandson."

The little woman looked at him wildly for a moment and then quietly slipped to the ground. She had fainted in real earnest, and George rang the bell for assistance. Margery, who had evidently been lurking outside, rushed in. When she saw her friend extended pale and lifeless on the carpet she turned on George with a furious face.

"What have you been doing to the poor darling?" she demanded, "you—you." She raised her hand to strike, but Brendon caught her by the wrist.

"I have been doing nothing," he declared, quelling the rage of the she-bear by the power of his glance. "Miss Bull fainted unexpectedly. Thank goodness here is some one."

It was one of the servants, but Margery waved her off. "No one but me—no one but me!" she cried, and took the slender form of her friend up in her arms. "Wait here," she added to George. "I'll be down soon."

When she left the room George looked at the servant, who was a quiet, respectable old woman. "Is that girl mad?" he asked.

"She's queer, poor soul, sir," replied the woman, "and entirely devoted to Miss Bull. And well she may be, for it is Miss Bull who manages the house. The girl is a natural, sir."

"She looks like it," replied George, sitting down. "You can go. I shall wait here until Miss Bull recovers."

"Yes, sir," replied the woman, and departed. But as she closed the door George heard her muttering something to herself about the danger of Margery's claws scratching him.

Brendon did not feel very comfortable on this point himself. He saw that Margery was a kind of untamed animal who had been brought into subjection by Miss Bull. No other person could manage her, and should she return, still in a passion, Brendon feared lest she should use physical violence. Still he held his ground, as he was anxious to learn how the old maid was feeling, and still more anxious to find out, if possible, why she had fainted on hearing his name. "I wonder if Mrs Jersey told her anything," muttered George as he looked out of the window; "but that's impossible. Mrs Jersey would keep her own secret so as to terrorize over Derrington. Besides, Miss Bull declared that she recognized my face. I wonder if she knew my father, and if she can throw any light on the murder. It is strange that she should be connected with the matter and live in the same house as Mrs Jersey. Upon my word," said George, in disgust, "it seems as though there were a gang of shady people here connected with my affairs. And she was moved by the mention of Dorothy's name. I wonder what that meant?"

But whatever it did mean he did not learn that day. Margery returned and stated that Miss Bull was better, but was too faint to resume the conversation. She begged Mr Brendon to call another day. Margery gave this message in quite a friendly way, and nodded smilingly to the astonished George. "You are better disposed toward me," he said, taking up his hat.



"Miss Bull told me to be kind to you," she declared, still smiling; and then, with a burst of good nature, "I will be kind. Do you want to know about the papers?"

"If you choose to tell me," said George, artfully, but rejoicing at the opportunity this offered of learning something.

"Yes, I do choose," said Margery. "She asked me to be kind to you."

"Well, then, tell me," replied George, humoring her.

"There was a lease in the green box, and many bills," said Margery, "a few photographs, and that was all. I couldn't see the story."

"What story, Miss Watson?"

Margery nodded with a cunning smile, and answered, in a whisper, as though her aunt was still alive and within hearing. "She told me it was a story she was writing. Oh, such a long story! Sheets and sheets of a story—foolscap sheets. She kept them in a long blue envelope and would not let me see them."

George reflected that evidently Mrs Jersey had been writing out an account of her early life, and Margery's next words put the matter beyond a doubt. "My aunt said that she would let me have the story to read after she died. But I could not find it in the green box."

"Perhaps you did not look thoroughly," suggested George.

"Yes, I did, and I looked in all other places. But I could not find it. The story was Italian," went on Margery, staring at him, "for when my aunt wasn't looking I peeped. San Remo is in Italy, isn't it?"

"I believe so," replied George, more and more convinced that Mrs Jersey had left a confession behind her. "Did you tell Miss Bull?"

Margery nodded. "She said I wasn't to say a word about it. But she will not be angry at my telling you. She likes you, and says you are like some one she once knew and loved."

Brendon did not pursue the conversation. He was afraid lest Margery might say too much and Miss Bull might be angry. And it was necessary that he should keep on good terms with Miss Bull. Evidently she had known his father; she may even have loved him. But George had heard so much that day that his brain was quite bewildered, and he wanted to be alone to think the matter out. Only one last request he made of Margery. "Will you show me the photographs which were in the green box?" he asked persuasively.

"I can't," she replied, drawing down her lip like a child; "Miss Bull has them. But she'll show them to you," brightening, "for she likes you. I like you too. You are so handsome."

With a laugh and a blush at this naïve compliment George left the house, promising to call again. With his head filled with many thoughts consequent on his two interviews, he emerged from Amelia Square and walked down to Oxford Street. A shout aroused him from his day-dreams as he reached the corner. He saw a tall, red-headed man crossing the road, and a cab was bearing down on him. The man stood paralyzed in the center, and it was apparent that the horse would soon be on him. George, almost without thinking, dashed into the street, and, seizing the animal, reined it back on its haunches with a powerful hand. There was a shout of admiration from the throng on the footpath, a few oaths from the driver of the hansom, and the next minute the red-headed man was thanking his preserver on the pavement and shaking his hand violently.

"Don't you think I'll forget it, sir," he said with rather an American accent. "You have saved Bawdsey, and Bawdsey can help you at a pinch."

Brendon was too bewildered by this extraordinary address to take it all in. Besides, the admiring crowd pressed around. Seeing this, Bawdsey took him by the arm and ran him round the corner into a quiet street. George recovered and looked at the man he had saved.

He was a tall man with a thin face, though his body was rather stout. His hair was red, his eyes were blue, and he had an alert manner about him which made Brendon wonder how such a sharp person ever came to place himself in the position of being run over. But Bawdsey gave him no time to think. "What is your name?" he asked.

"George Brendon."

Bawdsey stepped back, and a look of genuine surprise overspread his freckled face. And he was apparently more astonished than he showed, as Brendon guessed by the trembling of his hands. "I have lived over fifty years in the world," said Bawdsey, "and this is the queerest thing I ever dropped across. And I drop across many queer things, stranger."

"Well, Mr Bawdsey, if that is your name," said George, good-humoredly, "it is a good thing I have saved your life. But you seem as though you could——"

"I can—I can," interrupted Bawdsey, anticipating the remark. "But have you ever heard of that disease—fear of open spaces?"

"No," replied Brendon, "what is it?"

"I shan't give you the medical name," said Bawdsey, "as you would not understand. But it is a dread to cross any open space. At times it takes me unexpectedly, and I get a sort of paralysis of the

will and cannot move. That was why I stopped in the middle of the road. I should have been killed but for you."

"Perhaps I had better see you home, then," said Brendon.

"No. I shall take a cab. It is only now and then that the thing takes me. It can't be cured and maybe it will get worse. At present it does not prevent me attending to my work. Come home with me and I'll tell you more. I live in No. 43 Amelia Square."

"What, in that house?" cried George, for this was the number of the Jersey mansion.

"Yes. What do you know of it?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, yes, you do; but you won't trust me. However, I'll see you again, and I'll trust you. Take care of Lola Velez. She means you harm."

The next moment he was gone, and George was staring after him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A BACCHANTE

**L**OLA VELEZ was the rage for a season. She sprang into fame in a single night, and thenceforth held an undisputed position as the favorite of the London public. She was not exceptionally handsome, nor was her dancing distinguished by any special grace; but about her there was something weird and original, which appealed to her audience. Such an extraordinary dancer had never been seen on the stage. She capered like one in a frenzy, with mad leaps and bounds, and throughout her orgiastic performance behaved as one possessed. It was not so much the poetry of motion as the madness of movement. George Brendon had been instrumental in introducing her to the public, and she owed her position as much to his kindness as to her own genius.

It was a snowy winter's night when Brendon found her. He had just entered Pembroke Square, where he had lodgings, when he heard a moan. Turning aside into the shadow of a wall he found a woman lying there, exhausted with cold and hunger. Always anxious to do good, he brought the poor creature to his rooms. Under the influence of food and wine and warmth she revived sufficiently to tell her story.

Her name, she stated, was Lola Velez. She was Spanish by birth, but had lived many years in Italy. Trained as a dancer, she had appeared at several of the best theaters with more or less success; but

owing to her violent temper she had lost all chance of gaining a permanent position. But that Lola was rendered weak by privations she would not have told George the exact truth; but she confessed to her temper, to a certain episode connected with the stabbing of a woman of whom she was jealous, and to the many quarrels which had resulted in her being thrown out of employment. Finding Italy too hot to hold her, she had danced her way to Paris through various small towns, but here, as elsewhere, her temper proved her ruin. Then she had crossed the Channel, only to find that the market was overstocked with dancers. Unable to obtain employment, and having very little money, the unfortunate woman had fallen lower and lower, until she was reduced to begging in the streets. Finally she was turned out of her poor lodgings and had expended her last sixpence on food. It was shortly after this that Brendon found her.

He acted the part of a good Samaritan. Giving her a sovereign, he sent her away, restored in a measure to her right mind. The next day he saw the proprietor of a music-hall, with whom he was acquainted, and procured her an engagement in a ballet. It was a Dresden china piece, and the violent dancing of Lola was by no means suited to the Watteau costumes and stately dances of the powder and patches type. But the manager—a shrewd Jew called Kowlaski—saw in his new recruit the possibilities of success. He staged a ballet adapted from “The Bacchanals” of Euripides, and Lola danced the part of Agave, the mother of Pentheus, who is rendered insane by Bacchus.

Her success was immediate. She enacted the part with a reckless abandon and a wild frenzy which thrilled the house. For the moment Lola was not herself, but the wild Theban Queen raging in the

orgies of the Wine-god. All London came to see the frantic revels over which Lola presided, and night after night the little music-hall was filled to overflowing. Lola made good use of her fame. She insisted that her salary should be raised, took modest lodgings in Bloomsbury, and, for a time, saved her money as a provision against old age and poverty. On the stage she was a dancing demon, but at home no one could have been more modest. There was not a breath of scandal against her, in spite of Mrs Ward's hint to Brendon.

This change in the formerly reckless woman was caused by love and gratitude to George. He had saved her from starvation, from death, he had procured her the engagement which had led to her success and present ease, and, figuratively speaking, she cast herself and all she had at his feet. Brendon found this excessive gratitude rather trying. Even then he was in love with Dorothy, whom he had met twice or thrice, and he was not disposed to accept the wild passion which Lola so freely offered to him. He tried to make her see reason, to look upon him as a friend and not as a lover, but in her insane way she resolutely refused to regard him as other than the man she intended to marry. In spite of her tempers and her wild career Lola had never erred, and so far Brendon could well have made her his wife. But he did not love her, and hardly relished the idea of taking this wild creature to his heart and home.

Lola could not understand this coldness. She was accustomed to see men at her feet and to spurn them. Now that she was willing to surrender her liberty and to give her love, it exasperated her to think that the one man she had chosen would have none of her. As yet she knew nothing of Brendon's love for Dorothy, but with the instinct of a jealous

woman guessed that some such passion engrossed the mind of the man she desired to marry. Again and again she deluged George with questions, which he always refused to answer, so she could learn nothing. Wearied of her persistency, Brendon stopped away, and for a few weeks Lola did not see him. She followed him to his rooms, but found him absent. Then she saw his name in the papers connected with the Amelia Square tragedy, and wrote to him. He accepted her invitation and came to supper, less because of her desire than because he wished to speak to her about Bawdsey. The name of Lola Velez on the lips of the red man had startled Brendon almost as much as the fact that Bawdsey appeared to be acquainted with him. George could not recall meeting the man, and as he was not yet sufficiently famous for his name to be on the lips of the public, he wondered how it came about that Bawdsey knew of his existence. Anxious to know who the man was, he sent a note, marked private, to Miss Bull, and received a reply stating that Mr Bawdsey was a new boarder, and, so far as she knew, a gentleman who lived on his income. But this did not satisfy Brendon, as it did not account for Bawdsey's knowledge. There remained Lola to question, and to Lola George went a night or two after the rescue of the red man. George made up his mind, and a strong mind it was, that he would not leave Lola until he knew positively how her name came to be mentioned by Bawdsey.

At eleven o'clock Lola was anxiously awaiting his arrival, and when he entered her little sitting-room she flew to kiss his hand, her usual extravagant form of greeting. George, like all Englishmen, hated scenes, and these Lola was always making. In vain had he tried to break her of these melodramatic tendencies. Her hot Southern blood would



not cool, and she overwhelmed him with protestations of more than friendship. Of these he took no notice, and as it takes two to make love as well as to make a quarrel, Lola was yet far from gaining her heart's desire. This was a formal offer of marriage.

Having just returned from the music-hall, Lola wore a loose tea-gown of scarlet trimmed with glittering jet. It was a bizarre garment, but the vivid color suited her dark face and Southern looks. She was rather tall, very slender, and she moved with the dangerous grace of a pantheress. Her face was oval, sallow and thin, with ever-changing expressions. She was never two minutes the same, but her prevailing mood was one of fierce intensity. The smoldering fire in her great black eyes blazed into passionate love as she swept forward to greet her visitor.

"My deliverer, my adored!" she cried in moderately good English, and kissed his hand with burning lips.

George snatched it away. "Don't, Lola. You know I hate that sort of thing!" And so saying he threw down his coat and hat on the sofa at the far end of the room.

Lola shrugged her shoulders and coiled up a tress of her black hair which had come loose. Putting it in its place, she glanced into the mirror over the fireplace to see that her comb was at the right angle. She wore a diamond comb in the Spanish fashion. So fond was she of jewels that George sometimes fancied she must have Jewish blood in her veins. All her savings went in jewels—diamonds for choice. "They are pretty," Lola would say when Brendon remonstrated with her, "and when I am poor they can be changed into money. Oh, yes, why not?"

"Ah, but you are a cold blood, you English man," she said in allusion to Brendon's action. "But what would you—it is the fogs and cold snows. Come, my friend, to the table—to the table."

She clapped her hands, and seizing George by the arm forced him into a seat. The supper looked very tempting. Lola had an eye for the beautiful, and arranged the table herself. A tall silver lamp with a pink shade shed a roseate light on the white cloth, the glittering crystal, and the quaint silver spoons and forks. Lola had picked up these things at odd times and displayed very good taste in her selection. In the center of the table was an oval silver dish filled with pink roses. "What extravagance!" said George.

"Ah, bah! I got them from San Remo—from a friend of mine," said Lola, removing a dish-cover; "they cost me not one sou. George, my dear friend, the Chianti is in the flask there, and this macaroni? Eh?" George passed his plate. The viands were cooked in the Italian fashion, and there was a foreign air about the supper which was grateful after a long course of English cooking. What with the foreign dishes, the pink-shaded lamp, and the candles likewise in pink shades on mantelpiece and sideboard, George felt as though he were in a Soho restaurant. The night was cold, he was hungry, and the supper, with its surroundings, was novel. He therefore made a good meal. Lola watched him eat with satisfaction.

"Ah, you like my housekeepers," she said, meaning housekeeping; "it is to your mind. Yes? Eh, my friend, I could feed you as fat as pigs if you would but allow me."

"I don't want to be fat," retorted George, reaching for the Chianti. "Give me a cigarette, Lola."

She produced her own case, and not only supplied

him with one, but insisted on placing it between his lips and on lighting it. George wriggled uncomfortably, but it was no use objecting to Lola's ways. She would indulge her whims at any price. And he did not wish to leave until he had accomplished his mission.

"There, little friend," cried Lola, when he was seated comfortably by the fire and she was puffing also at a cigarette, "now we must talk. Why have you not been? Oh! you wicked young boy!"

"I have been engaged," replied George, secretly admiring the careless grace with which she was half lying, half sitting in the armchair opposite. She showed a dainty foot encased in a red stocking and a red shoe. Lola was all in crimson from head to foot, save for the jet and her dark face and hair. She looked like some sorceress bent upon unholy conjurations.

"Engaged!" she repeated with a flash of her wonderful eyes. "That is words for 'I don't want to come.'"

George laughed, shook his head, and changed the subject. Her remark about having a friend in San Remo ran in his mind. "Have you ever been there?" he asked, naming the town.

"Ah, bah! have I been anywhere? All Italy I know—all—all."

"You know it better than Spain. Yet you are Spanish."

"I am whatever you desire, my George. Yes, I am of Spain—of Cadiz, where my parents sold oil to their ruin. They came to Italy, to Milan, and made money to live from wine. I was trained to the dance—they died, and I, my friend—"

"You told me all this before," interrupted Brendon, ruthlessly. "I ask if you have ever been to San Remo?"

"Why, yes, assuredly, and why not?" She looked at him with narrowing eyes as she put the question, blinking like a cat.

"There is no reason, only I was thinking——" He paused.

"Eh, you think—of what?"

"Oh, something which does not concern you, Lola."

"All that is of you is to me," she responded. "I love you."

"Lola, be reasonable."

"Pschutt! I mock myself of your reason," she cried, snapping her fingers and speaking in quite a French way. "I leave reasons to your chilly English ladies. I—eh, but you know I am of the South. To you—to you, my adored preserver, do I give myself."

George grew angry. "If you talk like this, Lola, I shall go away."

"Ah, then good-night to you. Let it be adieu and never come back."

"Not at all. Be a reasonable woman and sit down. Give me some more wine and a cigarette. I want to ask you a question."

Lola poured out the wine and tossed him a cigarette, but she refused to sit down or to compose herself. In a flaming temper she whirled about the room, talking all the time. "Ah, yes, but it is so always! I am a fool to love you, cold one—pig of an Englishman."

"That's grateful," said George, quietly, and she was at his feet.

"Ah, but no! I am a bad womans. I am entirely all wicked. You are an angel of the good God. Dearest—my own——" She stretched adoring hands, and her eyes glittered like stars.

George reasoned with her. "Lola, do you wish me to be pleased with you?"

"Assuredly, and why not?"

"Then sit down in your chair like a Christian and talk sensibly."

She sat down, or rather flung herself into the chair with a whirl of scarlet draperies. "Decidedly I am a Christian. I go to mass, I confess—yes, I confess to the priest how I love you."

"Do you really love me, Lola? I was told that you wished me harm."

She started from her chair with a passionate gesture.

"Who says it is liars of the worst. Tell me who speak, that I may tear and scratch."

"No! no! I don't want a scandal."

"For her sakes, oh, yes!" She subsided sulkily. "I am nothings."

"For whose sake?" asked Brendon, rather alarmed, for he did not wish this tigress to know about Dorothy.

"The other woman's. Oh, yes, there is some one else. I know. You are mine all, and would be but for the other womans. Imbecile that I am to think of you who kick me hard—hard. And I can learn nothing—nothing. If I did—if I knew, I——" She stopped and breathed hard.

"I wonder you don't have me watched," said George, thoroughly angry at her unreasonable attitude. Lola tossed her head, and her expression changed to one of alarm. Brendon saw the change and guessed its meaning. "You did have me watched."

"And what if I did?" she demanded defiantly. "You are mine."

"I am not yours," he retorted angrily. "I have given you no cause to think that I would marry you."

Lola burst into tears. "You took me from the stones and snows," she wept with extravagant

**grief.** "Why did I not die? You fed me with foods and made me shine in this London; you win my heart, and then—then—pschutt!" she snapped her fingers, "you toss it aside."

"Why did you have me watched?" asked George, sternly.

"I want to know of the other woman," she replied sullenly.

"There is no——" He broke off. "It has nothing to do with you."

Lola sprang to her feet with fierce eyes. "Then there is another—another—oh, you cruel! Name of names, but I shall find her. I shall tell her——"

"You shall tell her nothing—you shall not see her."

"But I will. Eh, yes. You do not know me." This with a stamp.

"I know you cannot behave decently, Lola. If you have me watched again, if you dare to—to—bah!" George stamped in his turn. "I have had enough of this. Behave, or I go and will not return."

She flung herself at his feet with a wail. "Ah, but no," she sobbed, "I do love you so dearly—I will die if you love me not."

George drew himself roughly away, and taking her by the hands placed her in a chair, where she hid her face and sobbed. "Who was it you got to watch me—you hired to watch me?" George advisedly used the word "hired" as he thought she might have engaged one of her friends to do the dirty work, instead of engaging a professional. Yet he knew she was quite capable of going to a private inquiry office.

"I shall not tell you," said Lola, sitting up with a hard expression on her mouth and in her eyes.

"Did you pay him much?" asked Brendon, dexterously.

"I paid him what I chose," retorted Lola, falling into the trap.

"Ah! Then it *was* a professional detective you engaged. You have been to one of those inquiry offices."

"That is my business," said Lola, who, seeing she had made a slip, became more obstinate than ever. More to show her calmness, she lighted a fresh cigarette and smoked it defiantly.

George shrugged his shoulders. He was not going to argue with her. Remembering that Bawdsey had mentioned her name, and that Bawdsey appeared to know all about himself, he began to put two and two together. Certainly he might be wrong, and Bawdsey might have nothing to do with the matter. Still it was worth while trying to startle Lola into a confession by the use of his name. His rescue of Bawdsey hinted that the long arm of coincidence might be at work. "Well, I don't know where he comes from—" began George.

Lola snapped him up. "Ah, yes, and you think it is a man. Bah! why not a woman, my dear?" she sneered.

"Oh, you may have half-a-dozen at work—male and female both," said George, taking his seat, "but I should have thought that the red man was clever enough to—"

She threw away her cigarette and rose to her feet with such manifest alarm that George knew his guess was correct. "You talk foolish."

George looked at her angry face serenely. "Did Bawdsey when he said you wished me harm?"

"What?" She flung up her hands, with blazing eyes. "Did he say I do wish you harm? Was it—that—that cow—pig—"

"Don't call names, Lola, and don't distress yourself. It was Bawdsey."

Lola saw that she had gone too far, and had, vulgarly speaking, given herself away. She tried to recover lost ground. "I do not know his names," she said sullenly; then burst out, "but I wish you no harm. Eh, will you believe that, my preserver?"

"I'll believe nothing if you will not tell me the truth," said Brendon, a little cruelly. "Come, Lola, admit that you paid Bawdsey to watch me."

"I did not pay—no, not one sou. He did it for love."

"Oh, indeed! So Bawdsey is in love with you?"

Lola threw back her head defiantly. "Yes, he is, and I care not one, two, three little trifles for him. Chup! He is old—he is red—he is one big fool, that I can twist and twist—"

"And you apparently have done so. Well, then, Lola, did you get him from a private inquiry office?"

"No, I did not so. He loved me, and sent me flowers—oh, many, many flowers—those roses." She pointed to the silver dish.

"So you can't tell the truth even in that," said George, deliberately. "What of the friend in San Remo?"

"It is his friend. He had flowers from his friend. He told that."

Brendon sat up with an eager look in his eyes. So Bawdsey knew some one in San Remo. Probably he had been there, and Bawdsey was acquainted with his name. Brendon began to think that there was some meaning in all these things and plied Lola with questions. She was sulky at first and would not answer. But Brendon knew how to manage her, and before the conclusion of the conversation he got the whole truth out of her. This was accomplished by using what the Americans call 'bluff.'



"So Bawdsey knows San Remo, and he is fifty, or over fifty, years of age. H'm! He knows all the history of the place, I suppose."

"I know not—nothing do I know."

"Ah, that's a pity! Bawdsey could tell you some nice tales." He fixed a keen glance on her. "About some yellow holly, for instance."

Lola winced, for the shot had gone home. But she still held to her declaration of ignorance. "I know nothings—absolutely."

"But apparently this man knows a great deal. He is in love with you, and must have told you much. Did he inform you of a certain murder which took place at San Remo?"

"Ah, bah! Why should he? I knew of all already."

"You! How did you know?"

"My father and my mothers, they lived in San Remo when—oh, they did tell me all of that Englishman."

"Did they know who murdered him?" asked George, marveling at this unexpected discovery.

"No. No one know anythings."

"Was there no suspicion?"

"Not one suspicions. I know nothings," she repeated doggedly.

"It strikes me that you do. How did you and Bawdsey come to be talking of this matter?"

"We did not talk." Lola looked down at her foot as she told the lie and moved it restlessly.

George rose and took up his hat. Throwing his coat over his arm, he moved toward the door. "Good-night, mademoiselle."

She sprang to her feet and flew after him. "No! no!" she cried in lively alarm. "You must not go, my dearest dear."

"What is the use of my stopping when you will

not show your gratitude toward me by telling the truth?" George hated to make such a speech as this, but it was the only way in which he could move her.

"I will tell! I will tell. Sit down. The coat—you shall not go. I will say all. Ask what you will. Sit, my little cabbage—a wine in the glass—ah, yes!—and a cigarette. Come, be good. Am I mademoiselle?"

"No," said George, smiling on her pleading face, "you are my friend Lola now that you are sensible."

"Ah, only friend!" she said sadly. "But I speak. Yes?"

George began at once to question her, lest the yielding mood should pass away. "You made the acquaintance of Bawdsey at the hall?"

Lola nodded. "He loved me; he sent me flowers; he was made a presentation to me by Kowlaski. I learn that he looks after people, what you call a—*un mouchard*—"

"A spy—yes, go on."

"And I made him watch you. I told him your name."

"Did he know my name?" asked Brendon, quickly.

"He knew everything—oh, yes—all—all!"

Brendon was taken aback. "All—all what?" he asked amazed.

"Why—" Lola twirled her fingers—"all what you would not tell to me, my dear. That your names is Vane, and milor—"

"Derrington! Did Bawdsey mention Lord Derrington?"

"Yes. Oh, many times he speaks of milor. I speaks of San Remo. This—this Bawdsey ask me of the blue domino—of the holly—"

"Of the murder, in fact."

"It is quite so, my friend. Of the murder of your father."

"What?" George started from his seat. "Did he know that the man who was murdered at San Remo was my father?"

"Yes, and that it was difficult about the marriages."

"That also. He appears to know the whole story. And he mentioned Lord Derrington. That is how he comes to be acquainted with these facts. A spy—Derrington is employing him. And the man is boarding in Amelia Square." George struck his hands together. "By Jove, it's a conspiracy, and I never knew anything!"

"I do not wish you to have the marriages right, George," said Lola, with a pout. "If you are as what you are, then you will marry me. She will not be madame."

"She? Who?"

"The woman you—you—love." Lola got out the word with difficulty and burst into extravagant rage. "But she will not have you. No, you are mine. You will be Brendons—as I know you, and not Vane—never milor. I will not let it. If you are milor you marry her."

"Did Bawdsey tell you the name of the lady?"

"No. But he will tell. But she is a well-born one, and I am of the gutter. But I love you—ah, yes, I love you!" She threw her arms round him. "Be still Brendons, and not milor, and I am yours."

"No! no!" George took her arms from his neck and spoke more soberly. "Lola, hold your tongue about what you have told me, and I'll see you again. If you speak, I see you no more."

"I will be silent," she said as Brendon put on his coat. "But you are cruel, wicked. You shall never be milor, never!"

“How do you know?” asked George, contemptuously.

Lola’s eyes blazed. “I know. I know. You will never be milor.”

## CHAPTER IX

### CLEVER MRS WARD

“**A**N invitation—an invitation to dinner. By Jove, I never thought I’d get that far. The Honorable Mrs Ward, too. Hurrah!”

Leonard Train made these remarks over a letter which had come by the morning post. It was a delicate perfumed friendly note, begging dear Mr Train to come to dinner the next evening without ceremony. “I have just learned that your dear mother was at school with me,” wrote Mrs Ward in her most gushing style. “So you will see why I write informally. Do come.” The “Do” was underlined, and Leonard could hardly contain himself for joy at this proof that a member of the aristocracy was disposed to be friendly. “A woman of the highest fashion, too,” chuckled Leonard.

To account for Train’s exuberant joy, which seemed out of all proportion to its reason, it must be explained that, notwithstanding his money, and what he regarded as his talents, he had never managed to enter the fashionable world. As he was as vain as a peacock, and anxious to shine and be admired among people worth knowing, this was a great grief to him. George took him to several houses, but Leonard did not seem to be a success, for after one visit he was never asked again, although he left cards assiduously. This invitation of Mrs Ward’s was purely voluntary, as she had met him only once and had snubbed him when she did meet

him. At the time he had thought her a horrid woman, but now he was prepared to bow down and worship.

Leonard's father had been in trade, and the nice little income he inherited had been made out of a patent medicine, most drastic in its effects, that claimed to cure all diseases. Train senior, a shrewd innkeeper, had bought it from one of his customers—a drunken doctor meant for better things, but who had fallen on evil days. By judicious advertisement, and with the aid of many bought testimonials from penniless members of the aristocracy, Train managed to make the drug a success. Train's Trump Pill was seen on every boarding, and Mr Ireland possessed one of the original posters.

Soon Train senior became rich, very rich, and, having improved his manners and suppressed his parents, he was taken up by people of good position who needed ready money. He bought his way into the fringe of the fashionable world, and finally married a rather elderly lady, who had blue blood, extravagant tastes, and no money. She presented him with Leonard, and then, thinking she had done her duty, arranged to enjoy herself. Mrs Train spent the proceeds of the Trump Pill recklessly, and before her husband died she managed to get through the greater part of his wealth. Train settled an income of five thousand a year on his son, and let Mrs Train do what she liked with the rest. Then he died, and Mrs Train sent Leonard to Eton, afterward to college. When he was thus off her hands she enjoyed herself amazingly, and finally died in Paris, after spending every penny of the principal and interest of the large fortune left by her husband. Leonard mourned his mother, although he had seen very little of her. Then he settled in London on his five thousand a year and

posed as a literary man. But the desire of his life was to be fashionable. Hence his delight at the letter.

"Of course I'll go," soliloquized Leonard, when calmer. "I wonder if George will be there. He loves that Ward girl, so he might. Mrs Ward does not approve of the match, so he might not. I wonder if there is a regular engagement. If not, I might have a shot myself. The Honorable Mrs Train—no, that would be the mother."

It will be seen that Leonard was not very faithful to his absent friend; but the fact is that Train was less devoted to Brendon than he had been. The episode of Amelia Square made him fight rather shy of George. The story of the marriage was shady, and in some way—Leonard couldn't exactly explain how—seemed to be connected with the murder of Mrs Jersey. Moreover, Leonard knew something which he had not mentioned to Brendon, and would not have mentioned it for the fashionable world. However, he had said nothing about George's history, and so far had kept faith. But Brendon saw that Leonard was no longer so pleased to see him as formerly. He therefore avoided the fat young man, and Leonard did not seem to mind the avoidance. Indeed, he appeared to be rather relieved than otherwise. Brendon never asked himself the reason of this behavior, as he thought it best to let sleeping dogs lie. That Leonard would speak never entered his head.

And Leonard never intended to speak, being weak, but honorable in his own foolish way. But when Mrs Ward's invitation came he walked blindfolded into a trap set by that clever little woman. She asked Train to dinner, not because she had known his mother—although that was true enough—but for the simple reason that she wished to hear what he

knew about the Amelia Square tragedy. Brendon had told her much, but it was probable that Train, being a weak idiot in the hands of a pretty woman like herself, would tell her more. Mrs Ward was by no means reconciled to the possibility of Brendon marrying her daughter, and wished to find some scandal smirching George, that she might induce Dorothy to break the engagement. She would have utilized the tales about Lola and Brendon, but that she was not sure of her ground in this particular direction, and, moreover, having seen the Spanish dancer, feared lest so passionate a woman should make an open scandal. It was the aim of Mrs Ward's life to do wrong things, and to avoid troubles arising from them. Therefore, she, for the time being, put Lola on the shelf and arranged in her own scheming mind to make use of Leonard. "I can work him like a lump of putty," said Mrs Ward, contemptuously. A vulgar illustration, but a true one. Besides, she said it in the solitude of her own room when she was dressing for dinner, so no one heard its vulgarity or its truth.

When Leonard entered the drawing-room he was welcomed by Dorothy, who told him that Mrs Ward would be down shortly. "It is only a small dinner, Mr Train," she said. "Mr Vane is coming; no one else."

"I expected to find my friend Brendon here," said Leonard, thinking how beautiful she looked.

"No! Mr Brendon is very busy at the present time with his book. He would have come otherwise."

"All things should give way where a lady is concerned," said Train, gallantly.

Miss Ward laughed. She had heard much of Train from Brendon, and thought him a kindly, but foolish young man. "I am not a woman of that sort, Mr



**Train.** I have no desire that a man should neglect his work for frivolity. You are a great friend of Mr Brendon?"

"The greatest he has."

"And he was stopping with you in the house where that tragedy took place. He told me about it."

Train secretly wished that George had held his tongue on this particular point, as he had his own reasons for not wishing to be questioned. With the very best intentions as to holding his tongue, he knew his weakness for babbling well enough, and found it easier to abstain from talking altogether than to be temperate in speech. "Brendon certainly stopped with me," he said reservedly, "but we were sound asleep when the murder took place. Neither of us heard anything. After the inquest we both returned to the West End."

"It was a most unpleasant experience," said Dorothy, thoughtfully.

"Very," assented Train, wiping his face. "I shall never go in search of types again."

"You can find amusing types in the West End," remarked Dorothy, in a low voice. "Here is one."

The young man who entered the room was a small, attenuated, precise atom of a creature, immaculately dressed and with a rather shrill voice. He answered to the name of the Hon. Walter Vane, and was the cousin of Brendon, although he did not know of the relationship. But Dorothy and Train both knew, and compared Vane's physique disadvantageously with that of Brendon. The one man was a splendid specimen of humanity, the other a peevish hypochondriac. Walter Vane had been "fast" in his time, and although he was not yet thirty he was now suffering from the consequences of his rapid ways. He was in the twenties, yet he was bald. He

was as nervous as an old woman and finicky as an elderly spinster. Lord Derrington, who was a bluff old giant of the country squire type, sneered at his degenerate descendant. All the same, he would not replace him by George, who was a man in looks and tastes after the old lord's own heart.

"Beastly night," lisped Vane, greeting Dorothy and taking no notice of Leonard. "I think there will be snow. I hope I won't get a bad cold. I am so subject to cold."

"Mr Train—Mr Vane," said Dorothy, introducing the two.

Vane stared and muttered something about "pleasure." Leonard caught no other word. He then continued his conversation with Miss Ward. "I sneezed twice at the Merry Music Hall the other night."

"That is where Velez dances," said Leonard, determined to speak.

Vane stared again, and it was Dorothy who answered. "My mother went to see her, and says she is a most extraordinary dancer."

"Oh, clever in a sort of mad way, and a regular bad one," chuckled the little man. Dorothy turned away. She did not like this conversation, as it offended her taste. But the next words of Vane made her pause. "I saw your friend Brendon at the hall, Miss Ward—the writing man, you know. A fine-looking chap, but sulky."

"The best man in the world," said Leonard, whereupon Dorothy gave him an approving look. She wondered what Vane would say did he know that the man he criticised so freely was his cousin and the legitimate heir to the Derrington title if he had his rights.

"Well, he has his larks like every one else. They say he is sweet on the dancer."

"Mr Vane!" cried Dorothy, the blood rushing to her face.

The little man became confused, conscious that he had transgressed the bounds of good breeding. He knew that Brendon admired Dorothy, and that Dorothy took pleasure in his society, but he was unaware that any deeper feeling existed. Mrs Ward had kept that sort of thing from him, as she did not want Vane to leave the coast clear for Brendon. And Vane was so egotistical that he never for one moment dreamed that George was his rival. Even if he had, he would have laughed the idea to scorn. In his eyes Brendon was merely a writing fellow and not to be named in the same breath with his noble, attenuated, rickety self.

"Well, good people," cried Mrs Ward, entering the room at this very opportune moment, "are you all here? Mr Vane, I am pleased. Mr Train, how good of you to come. Ah," Mrs Ward sighed, "you have your dear mother's eyes, and lovely eyes they were."

Having slipped in this compliment to put Leonard at his ease and throw him off his guard, Mrs Ward delivered him to Dorothy and took Vane into a shady corner. "Dinner will be ready soon," she said, fanning herself, although it was a cold winter's night. "I hope you are hungry, Mr Vane."

"I was," admitted her guest, "but I have to nurse my appetite carefully, you know, Mrs Ward, and I am rather put out."

"Not by Mr Train, I hope. He is a nice fellow, really, very nice, with money made out of pigs or whisky or something," said Mrs Ward, vaguely, for she was not certain. "What did he say?"

"He said nothing, but Miss Ward did."

Mrs Ward shrugged. "Oh, well, you know, dear Dorothy has such odd ideas, and all that sort of

thing. I suppose it was something about books, or philosophies, or grammar, or something. Enough to spoil any one's appetite, I'm sure."

"No. But I mentioned that Brendon—you know the writing fellow——"

"Yes, I know," said Mrs Ward, viciously, and at once on the alert.

"Well, I said that it was rumored he was sweet on Lola Velez, and Miss Ward fired up. Is she so great a friend of his as all that?"

"Oh, by no means," responded Mrs Ward, vivaciously. "A mere acquaintance, you know. They talk books, I believe, and how moths get wings like those animals before the flood. She thinks he is goody-goody. I'm sure he's dull enough. Lola Velez! oh, a perfect dear. How she can kick! So Mr Brendon is in—well, I never should have thought it of him; but these quiet men are always the worst."

So Mrs Ward rattled on in her incoherent manner, but perfectly clear in her own mind as to the good Vane's injudicious observation would do. If Dorothy once got it into her brain that George was an admirer of Lola, then there would be a chance of breaking the engagement. Before Vane could make any more remarks the gong thundered. Mrs Ward rose at once, rather glad of the stoppage of conversation. She liked a lively man, and Vane was a fool. But for all that she was quite prepared to give him Dorothy, as she would have given her to a prize idiot provided the idiot was sufficiently rich. "You take in Dorothy," she said to Vane, thus getting him off her shoulders, but not hoping to find Leonard a pleasant change. "I will take Mr Train under my wing."

In this order they entered the dining-room, Mrs Ward trying to stifle a yawn and wondering how she would get through such a dull evening. Luckily,

Vane mentioned that his grandfather had expressed his intention of looking in during the course of the evening, "If you will not mind, Mrs Ward," he said politely.

"Oh, I'm rather glad," replied the little woman, drawing off her gloves. "Such a delightful old gentleman! His anecdotes are quite in the best style."

"He told one to a bishop the other day," said Vane, laughing.

"Really, how amusing! And what did the bishop say?"

"He said nothing, but he looked sermons."

"Ah," sighed Mrs Ward, "bishops are so particular."

"I find them delightful," said Dorothy, filling in the pause.

"Of course, my dear, because they talk of Renan and missionaries and those sort of dry things. I remember the Bishop of Timbuctoo, or Central Africa, or some of those places one never heard of, telling me how his old curate was eaten alive by blacks and mosquitoes. I quite forget which; but he was eaten."

"I trust the blacks and mosquitoes didn't find the curate tough."

"I'm sure I don't know. He was just thirty, I believe, and bald."

"You said he was an old curate."

"Oh, dear me, Dorothy how can you expect me to explain what I mean?—at dinner, too. I mean he was young in years and old in saintliness. Do try this dish, Mr Train? It is so good."

Leonard did try it, and did full justice to the merits of Mrs Ward's cook. She kept a particularly good chef, as she knew the value of good cooking. "People like nice things to eat," she explained to Leonard, while Dorothy labored to entertain Vane.

"It makes one so popular if one's chef can always be relied upon. I have known a woman's position ruined by inattention to the kitchen. One can break all the ten commandments if only one feeds the men." Then, thinking she had said too much, she added sweetly, "But of course I am only joking, Mr Train, as one must be good and all that sort of thing."

"I'm sure you are all that is good and kind, Mrs Ward."

"Now, that's really very nice of you. Mr Brendon would never say a really nice thing like that. Of course he's a great friend of yours, isn't he? and he stopped with you when that poor woman——"

Leonard uttered an ejaculation. It seemed to him that he was pursued by the Amelia Square tragedy. First Dorothy, and now her mother. Was there no other topic of conversation? He would have answered an ordinary person rudely, being wearied of being questioned, but Mrs Ward, having the key of the door which led into the fashionable world, was to be conciliated. He replied to her almost in the same words as he had used to Dorothy. "Mr Brendon did stop with me," he said, "but we were asleep when the murder took place."

"How extraordinary!" said Mrs Ward, languidly, yet with a keen eye on the change in Leonard's face. "I wonder who killed her?"

"No one knows," replied Train, shortly.

"Does no one suspect any one?"

"I believe not. The police are quite at fault."

"Oh, the police!" said Mrs Ward, in a proper tone of contempt. "They never do anything except make love to cooks. Do you suspect any one?"

Leonard flushed. "I, Mrs Ward? Why should I suspect any one?"

"Oh, I don't know. You have a clever face. Just

the kind of a face that one would think a brilliant detective would have. You must have some suspicions?" Again her eyes searched his face.

"No," he protested. "I was asleep. I know nothing about the matter."

"How stupid of you!" said Mrs Ward, beginning to think that her condescension in asking Leonard to dinner was wasted. "But you men are always so blind, poor dears! What kind of a woman was Mrs Jersey?"

"A nice motherly old creature."

"I know—like a monthly nurse. Was Mr Brendon introduced to her?"

"Yes. I took him into the drawing-room."

"Really. Have they drawing-rooms in Bloomsbury? How nice and civilized! Well, did Mrs Jersey and Mr Brendon get on well together? I want to know because you see, Mr Train, he admires Dorothy, and it is such a sign of a man's good-nature if he gets on well with strangers. I suppose Mrs Jersey liked him?"

"I think she did," replied Leonard, on whose weak head the claret was beginning to take effect, "but she was rather startled when she saw him first."

Mrs Ward's eyes flashed so brightly that Leonard would have been warned of his indiscretion had he not been looking at his plate. "Oh, how very interesting! But she never saw him before. Why should she be startled?"

"It wasn't at him exactly," said Leonard, "but at a piece of yellow holly he wore in his coat."

"Yellow holly," repeated Mrs Ward, with feigned surprise. "Why, of course Mr Brendon wore a sprig. My daughter gave it to him."

"So he told me, Mrs Ward."

"And I gave it to Dorothy," continued Mrs Ward, who for some reason wished to make an explicit

statement. "It is very rare, you know, and a man who lives in Devonshire sent me a bunch. Dorothy mentioned that Mr Brendon had begged for a piece. Yes! he would naturally wear it on that night, as he had just left my house. But why was this unfortunate woman surprised?"

"I can't say; but she was," answered Train; "she turned white, and we all thought she was about to faint."

"Did she give any explanation?"

"No. In a few moments she recovered, and nothing more was said."

"Oh!" Mrs Ward seemed disappointed. "Was that all?"

"Why—" Leonard turned his dull eyes on her flushed face—"what else did you expect to hear, Mrs Ward?"

"Nothing! Nothing," she said hurriedly, for she did not wish to make him suspicious, "but it seems so odd. Dorothy giving the holly, you know, and that Mrs Jersey should be upset. We must continue this conversation, Mr Train. It is really most interesting. But you literary men are quite fascinating. After dinner in the drawing-room, Mr Train. Dorothy!" She signaled with her fan, and her daughter arose. "Don't be too long over your wine," said Mrs Ward, as she left the room. "We can't spare you, Mr Train."

Leonard believed that all this attention was due to his own fascinations. His head was still heated with the wine he had drunk, yet he began to regret that he had said anything about the yellow holly. Certainly he had not promised George to be silent on this especial point; but he nevertheless thought it wiser to hold his tongue about all that had taken place in Amelia Square on the night of the murder. Warned in this way by his mother sense,



Train took no more wine, but after a rather dull conversation with Vane he went into the drawing-room. Dorothy was at the piano, and thither repaired Vane; but Mrs Ward, seated near the fire, called Leonard to her side. "I must introduce you: Lord Derrington—Mr Train."

The grandfather of George was a huge man, burly, red-faced, white-haired, and with a rather truculent expression. He was over seventy, yet carried his years like a boy. Under his bushy white eyebrows he shot a quick glance at Leonard from a pair of keen gray eyes and summed him up at once as a fool. But Lord Derrington had been a diplomatist many years before, and knew that even fools are sometimes useful. Moreover, he had learned from Mrs Ward's aimless chatter that Train was a great friend of Brendon's, and he knew more about George than George thought. However, Derrington, after that one glance of contempt, was very civil to Leonard.

"I am glad to meet you," he said, with a nod. "You go in for books, I understand from Mrs Ward."

He had a deep, raucous voice like that of an early starling, and spoke in an abrupt staccato kind of way. Train, who stood before him like a rabbit before a snake, compared him in his own mind with Becky Sharp's friend, the Marquis of Steyne. Derrington was quite as wicked and savage and unscrupulous as that celebrated nobleman.

"I do write a little," said Leonard, nervously.

"I believe in action rather than in writing," said Derrington. "There are far too many books written. Dreamers, all of you."

"Dreams may come true."

"And when they do come true, what is the use of them? Bah! In my young days we lived. Now people dream."

"I'm sure there's no dreaming about society nowadays," said Mrs Ward, laughing. "Every one is as sharp as a needle to get the better of his or her neighbor."

"Mutual Deception Society," said Derrington. "You-give-me-so-much-and-I'll-let-you-go-so-far. That's the sort of thing."

"But there is a great deal of philanthropy nowadays."

"And what good does philanthropy do, Mr Train?" said Derrington; "only makes people lazy. People are too sentimental. I would give half these paupers the cat if I had my way."

Train was quite sure that he would, for, with his red face and heavy jowl and savage air of command, he looked the picture of a Roman emperor. Derrington had the instincts of a despot, and Leonard could imagine him slaying and burning and doing all manner of evil things. He wondered how Brendon ever came to have such a villainous grandfather. It was on the tip of his tongue to say something about Brendon, just to observe the effect on Derrington. But his courage failed him and he held his peace. And at that moment Fate intervened. The drawing-room door opened, and a servant announced, "Mr Brendon!"

The next moment George came face to face with his grandfather.

## CHAPTER X

### DIPLOMACY

IT was a most awkward meeting. Dorothy, Train, and Brendon knew the truth, but Mrs Ward and Vane were ignorant. As to Lord Derrington himself, George was not sure. After his conversation with Lola he had a vague idea that since Bawdsey was connected in some way with his grandfather, Lord Derrington must have somehow learned that Brendon was the name his grandson had taken. There was no other way of accounting for the mention of Derrington's name by the private inquiry agent.

However this might be, Lord Derrington was too clever a man to betray himself. George felt that the old man knew who he was, but he could not be sure, for Derrington welcomed him with a well-bred air, as he would have done a stranger. Mrs Ward watched the meeting curiously, and Brendon noticed her inquiring gaze. But he put this down to his knowledge that Derrington knew he was a suitor for Dorothy's hand and wished the girl to marry Vane. Leonard was the only person in the room who displayed any visible disturbance. He grew red and restless. Brendon was perfectly calm.

"How delightful of you to come, Mr Brendon," said Mrs Ward, rising and apparently forgetting that she had forbidden him the house. "I must introduce you: Lord Derrington—Mr Brendon; and you know Mr Train."

"We are old friends," said George, calmly. "Miss Ward"—he bowed to Dorothy, who emulated his serenity although she felt anxious. But when she saw her lover's composure she knew that nothing disagreeable would occur, and her apprehensions were relieved.

There ensued a general conversation relative to the weather, to the doings of a certain politician, and to sundry other subjects more or less vague. George talked excellently, and was conscious that Derrington was listening with approval. Again and again he wondered if the old man really knew who he was, and again and again he failed to arrive at any conclusion. After a time Leonard went with Dorothy to the piano, where she played for his delectation, and Mrs Ward seized the opportunity to show Vane some new photographs of herself. Derrington and Brendon were practically alone, and the old lord appeared anxious to make himself agreeable. George was watchful for the cloven hoof, but it did not peep out. Truculent tyrant as Derrington was, yet he could play the part of a highly bred, polished gentleman of the old school to perfection. He did so on this occasion.

"I have heard of you from Mrs Ward," he said in his harsh tones, which no amount of politeness could render agreeable. "but I do not think we have met before."

"No. I cannot recall any meeting," replied George, wondering if the other was about to hint that he had seen some one resembling him. "I have seen you in the distance, however."

"Distance lends enchantment to the view in my case."

"You are pleased to say so, Lord Derrington."

"I generally do say what I please," responded the old man, shooting a sharp glance at George.

"Are you related to the Brendons of Shropshire?"

"No. I have not that privilege."

Derrington chuckled at this reply. He thought George had a good deal of the man in him when he answered thus fearlessly. "I have seen your name somewhere lately," he observed. "but I can't recall where or in what connection."

Brendon laughed, quite at his ease, although he did not know if this was an attempt to make him speak out. However, he did speak out, with the idea of seeing what would happen. "I can supply the connection," said he, lightly, but keenly observant of the old man's face. "My name appeared as a witness at an inquest a week or so back."

"Ah, now I remember, Mr Brendon. Quite so. It was that Amelia Square murder."

"You have a good memory, Lord Derrington."

"In this case you flatter me, Mr Brendon. There is no difficulty in my remembering the especial case, as Mrs Jersey was a tenant of mine."

George was not supposed to know this and displayed suitable surprise.

"Indeed," he said; "then you have lost a good tenant."

"Possibly," replied Derrington, rather grimly. "She always paid her rent regularly. You saw her?"

"Yes. My friend, Mr Train, was stopping in the house—"

"That young man." Derrington cast a look in Leonard's direction. "I did not know he was there on that night."

"He was a witness also," said Brendon, significantly.

"I can't remember all the names, sir. Well?"

"I stopped for the night with Mr Train, and during the night Mrs Jersey was murdered."

"You heard nothing—you saw nothing?"

"I was sound asleep the whole time," said Brendon, calmly.

"Humph!" Derrington pulled at his gray mustache in the very same way as George did when he was reflective. "What a pity. You might have discovered the assassin."

"I don't think the assassin will ever be discovered."

"That's luck for the assassin," rejoined the old lord, cynically. "You appear to be very certain, Mr Brendon."

George shrugged his shoulders. "No more certain than the police are," he replied. "They examined every one in the house, and no one could be accused—there was absolutely no evidence. And the assassin could not have entered the house, as the door was locked, and the key was in the pocket of the murdered woman."

Derrington, for some reason, appeared to be rather relieved. "I read all that in the papers," he said roughly. "You are telling me nothing new. But there, you didn't say you would. By the way, you stopped at that house. Do you know a Miss Bull?"

George nodded. "She told my fortune," he said.

"She told Mrs Jersey's fortune also, and a very true fortune did she tell," said Derrington, grimly. "What did she prophesy about you?"

"The usual thing," said Brendon, curtly.

"Trouble, I suppose. These card-people generally prophesy trouble, as it is certain to occur."

"There was trouble and enemies, and the promise that I should get my wish," said Brendon, with a quick look.

Derrington laughed. "What is your wish?"

"If I tell it I won't get it," replied George, also laughing; "but I don't believe in fortune-telling. It is rubbish."

"It wasn't in Mrs Jersey's case," said the other, who appeared to be a trifle superstitious.

"Oh, that was a mere coincidence. But you asked me about Miss Bull, sir! Do you know her?"

Derrington nodded. "She came to me on behalf of Mrs Jersey's niece and wished the lease renewed. I heard her story and consented. I dare say the niece will be quite as good a tenant as the aunt."

This conversation was all very well, but there was nothing to be learned from it on either side. Brendon could not discover if his grandfather knew to whom he was speaking, and Derrington found it impossible to learn if George could tell him anything of the case which had not been reported in the papers. For some reason Derrington wished to know what had transpired, and Brendon felt convinced that this anxiety was more than that of a landlord for the loss of a good tenant. He wondered if Derrington knew that Mrs Jersey had written out a confession and that it was missing. He would had liked to find out, but since he could not reveal himself as Derrington's grandson there was no chance of getting this information. Besides, Derrington appeared to grow weary of discussing the murder. "It is worn threadbare," he said. "All the papers have been talking about it. I agree with you, Mr Brendon, that the assassin will never be discovered."

"Never!" said George, looking full at the determined face of the old man. "Are you quite sure?"

"I am sure of nothing in this world, save that you said so yourself, Mr Brendon. However, there are pleasanter subjects to talk of. What about yourself—your aims, your ambitions, your chances of success?"

"Are those pleasant subjects?" laughed Brendon.

"To an old man such as I am," nodded the other. "I like to hear of the castles in the air which youth builds."

"I am afraid my castles will never turn to bricks and mortar," said Brendon with a sigh.

However, he was not averse to showing his grandfather that he was no fool, but a man with a head on his shoulders. George had a quick brain and a strong will and a considerable fund of information. He had taken a good degree at Oxford, and his literary articles always received praise from the public, and from his brethren of the press. Moreover, George was fond of politics, and could converse excellently on that fascinating subject. He laid himself out to please Derrington, knowing that the old tyrant was disappointed in the languid Vane, who was chattering commonplace to Mrs Ward. In a short time Brendon and Derrington were engaged in a discussion about Ireland and Irish Home Rule, and the old lord approved highly of Brendon's sentiments.

"You ought to be in the House, Mr Brendon," he said.

"I have no one to help me to such a goal."

Derrington was about to speak, and fastened his little eyes on the keen, handsome face of the younger man. But he suddenly changed his mind and turned away to talk to Mrs Ward. Brendon knew that he had succeeded in pleasing the old gentleman, and was glad that so much was accomplished. If Derrington found that he was clever and presentable, and likely to add luster to the family name, it was not improbable that he would recognize the marriage. But by this time George had it in his mind that Derrington knew who he was, and had been talking advisedly under the cover of pretended ignorance, so as to see what manner of man his unacknowl-



edged grandson was. "Well," thought Brendon, "he has learned that I am no fool, at all events."

Mrs Ward came across to George and left Derrington talking to Dorothy, for whom he professed a great admiration. He knew that Dorothy liked Brendon, as Mrs Ward had told him so, and he frankly acknowledged to her that Brendon was a clever man. "I wish my grandson had his brains," said Derrington, regretfully.

"I am pleased you like him," responded Dorothy, who could not tell him that Brendon was his grandson, and hardly knew what to say. "He is as good as he is clever."

This remark did not please Derrington. "Humph! I don't like good young men. They generally become bad old scamps."

"Were you a good young man, Lord Derrington?" asked Dorothy, demurely.

He appreciated the joke. "One of the best," he said, with a twinkle in his eyes, "consequently I have gone to the other extreme for many years."

"They say one always returns to his first loves," said Dorothy, smiling, "so you may revert to your godly youth."

Derrington shook his wicked old head. "My first loves are all dead and buried, my dear. But this Brendon—you like him?"

Dorothy did not see why she should conceal her feelings. "I love him," she said quietly and firmly.

"Ha!" replied Derrington, showing no surprise. "Mrs Ward hinted at something of that sort, but I thought that Walter——"

"Please say no more, Lord Derrington."

"Well, then, I won't." Derrington's eyes rested wrathfully on the withered young man he called grandson. "I don't wonder at your choice, my dear. What Walter requires is a nurse."

"That is a profession I have not taken up," said Dorothy, laughing. She was very anxious to say something good about George to Derrington, on the chance that it might soften his hard old heart. But after all, George had spoken for himself and was his own best advocate. If she interfered, seeing that she was supposed to know nothing of the relationship, she might make mischief. Therefore she held her tongue on the subject nearest to her heart and talked in the most general manner. Derrington said no more about Brendon, but Dorothy noticed that his eyes were rarely off the face of her lover. George had certainly made an impression.

Meantime, Vane joined Mrs Ward, and Dorothy, seeing that Leonard was alone, beckoned him to approach. Derrington was not particularly pleased at having his conversation with a pretty girl interrupted, but he was polite, and, on learning that Train knew Brendon intimately, he began to ask him about his friend. Train, to please Dorothy, and because he really admired George, spoke most enthusiastically. Dorothy listened in silence, well pleased. From Derrington's curiosity and persistent questioning she began to think he knew something of the relationship.

"But really, you know, she is a great artist," Mrs Ward was saying to Brendon; "there is something so original about her."

They were speaking of Lola Velez, and it was Vane who had introduced the subject. As Mrs Ward was a married woman, and knew the seamy side of social life, Vane had no hesitation in speaking about the dancer to her. George, to whom the subject was distasteful, tried to avoid the discussion; but Mrs Ward, on the alert for information, would return again and again to the topic.

"They say you know her very well," she declared.

"They? Who?" asked Brendon, lifting his eyebrows.

"I do, for one," said Vane in his weak voice; "a fellow told me that she owed her success to you."

"I am not sorry to put you right on that point," replied Brendon, his eyes hardening; "many false rumors are about—to one of which you alluded the other day, Mrs Ward. This is another. What I know of Señora Velez, and how I know her, can be put in a nutshell," and George quietly related his rescue of the dancer.

"Then you did make her the success she is!" cried Mrs Ward, when he ended. "Oh, yes, it's no use denying it. You picked a jewel out of the gutter and gave it a chance of shining."

"Perhaps I did that much. But she made a success by her genius."

"I hope she is grateful," murmured Vane, with a malicious smile.

Brendon turned on him sharply. "I don't know what you mean by gratitude," he said deliberately.

"Well," drawled the little dandy, "she is pretty and——"

"She is not at all pretty, Mr Vane, and were she as lovely as Cleopatra it would not matter to me. My connection with her ceased when she made her success." George quite forgot the presence of Mrs Ward and spoke vehemently. "Can't you understand that a man may do a kind action without being biased by the beauty of a woman?"

"Some men can," said Mrs Ward, politely, "and I am sure you are one, Mr Brendon. But suppose the woman——"

"I don't suppose anything, Mrs Ward. I know. Señora Velez was poor. I helped her to attain to the position she now holds because I endeavor to follow the preaching of Christ, and she is to me a

grateful friend. There is no more and no less to be said," and, a trifle ruffled, George turned on his heel to join Dorothy.

"Well, I'm sure," murmured Mrs Ward, "and in my own house, too."

Vane sniggered. "There must be something in it," he said.

"And the profane language he used. Of course I don't believe a word he says."

"Neither do I. She's too pretty."

So these two scandal-mongers talked on, and George had only made matters worse by his explanation. However, he believed that he had nipped the scandal in the bud, and strolled into the next room with Dorothy to quiet his mind. Behind them they left Derrington talking to Train and rather enjoying himself.

The room in which they found themselves was a pretty little apartment hung with amber silk, and illuminated with lights in yellow shades. The furniture was also yellow, and the carpet of a primrose hue. Mrs Ward only introduced her most intimate friends into this boudoir, as it was her own special sanctum; and if its walls could have spoken they could have supplied all the existing society papers with gossip enough to last a century.

"Do you think Lord Derrington knows who you are?" asked Dorothy as they seated themselves on a kind of divan.

"I am not sure," replied George, who did not want to tell her what he knew, lest he should have to introduce the name of Lola Velez. "I have an idea that he does."

Dorothy shook her head. "I don't think so. If he knows you he must be aware that you know him, and about the relationship, and would not speak so freely. I think he is taken with you, George."

"Well, he has been putting me through my paces. I only hope that our chance meeting of to-night may bear fruit. What is Train doing here? Your mother only had him in her house once before, and she does not like him."

"I can't make out why she asked him," said Dorothy; "he is a dull young man, though harmless enough. But my mother made a point of asking him to dinner."

"Humph! I wonder what that's for," said Brendon, wrinkling his brows, for he knew well that Mrs Ward did nothing without expecting an equivalent return. Then he recollected her questions about the crime, and wondered if she had invited Leonard so as to pump him. It was just what Mrs Ward did intend to do, but George could not think she had sufficient interest in the crime to justify such a course of action. Besides, he felt that he could trust Leonard to hold his tongue, in spite of the man's weakness. But in this he reckoned without Mrs Ward, who could have wiled an anchorite to chatter, had she been so minded.

And that is what she was doing at the very moment. Almost as soon as the lovers had disappeared into the yellow boudoir Lord Derrington had taken his departure. He insisted that Vane should come also, and would not allow the little dandy to take leave of Dorothy, nor would he take leave himself. This was done to punish Vane. "Miss Ward is quite happy in there," he said to Mrs Ward at the door of the drawing-room. "I won't have her disturbed."

"Oh, but really," cried Mrs Ward, who did not want Vane to go away with a bad impression, "Dorothy is simply bored with him."

"If she is bored with such a brilliant fellow she would not enjoy the company of Shakespeare himself."

"I'm sure I shouldn't," murmured Mrs Ward. "Shakespeare must have been an awful bore. But do say good-by, Lord Derrington. Dorothy will be so disappointed."

"No, she won't," snarled Derrington, who was enjoying himself at thus thwarting Mrs Ward's schemes. "Come along, Walter. Take me home and tell me your latest ailment. Good-night, Mrs Ward," and he went.

Derrington was chuckling, and Vane looked very sulky, so Mrs Ward saw that the old man had done this thing to spite her. "Horrid creature!" she pouted; "he ought to be dead and buried. It isn't respectable being alive at his time of life. He'll make Walter Vane angry with me, and I'm sure——" Here she caught sight of Leonard's astonished face, and became aware she was divulging secrets. At once she smoothed her brow and began to smile. This was an excellent opportunity to find out what she wanted. Taking Leonard's arm she led him to a chair some distance from the door of the boudoir.

"Now let us have a nice long talk, dear Mr Train," she said, settling herself amiably. "Mr Brendon and Dorothy are no doubt talking tadpoles or frogs or something nasty. They won't be out for a long time, so we can renew our pleasant conversation."

"I don't think it was very pleasant," said Train, unwillingly.

"What an ungallant thing to say!"

"I mean to talk about crime——"

"Is most amusing—I mean instructive. Oh, yes, I have read many of those novels—what do they call them?—detective novels."

"A very low form of literature," said the superior Leonard.

"Oh, they are amusing and interesting, and send one to sleep when one can't in spite of drops and morphia!" babbled Mrs Ward in her childish manner. "And I have often thought how nice it would be if one could really try and find out who killed a person. Now in this case, Mr Train, I am sure you heard something or saw something——"

"Upon my word I neither saw nor heard," protested Leonard. "I was in bed all the time."

"Didn't you hear a scream?"

"No."

"Then you must have heard the fall of the body, or the shutting of the door as the—ah!" Mrs Ward saw from the expression of Leonard's face that she had touched upon something. "You did hear——"

"No! no!" he stammered, wondering how he was to get out of confessing about the opening of the front door without appearing rude.

"Nonsense. Confess! Confess, you silly man!"

But Leonard was too loyal. To lead her away from the point he asked a question. "Mrs Ward, that yellow holly?"

"Yes. What about it?" She leaned forward eagerly.

"Did you give a sprig of it to any one else?"

"No. I only gave a bit to my daughter, and she——"

"She gave it to Brendon. Yes, I know. But did Miss Ward give any of it to a third person?"

"Certainly not. To do so she would have had to get it from me. But beyond the sprig that was given, and which Mr Brendon had, no holly went out of this house."

"It is very rare, is it not?"

"I believe so. I dare say there wasn't another bunch in London on that particular night. Of

course there might have been, still—but why do you ask all this?”

“Well,” said Leonard, “it seems to me that the yellow holly has something to do with the crime.”

Mrs Ward drew a long breath but said no word. He was speaking half to himself, and she did not wish to interrupt his train of thought. But she listened with all her ears. Leonard continued: “I found a berry in the room where she was killed. Yes. They took us in to see the body, and a horrid sight it was. I turned my eyes to the floor, and there I saw—just by the table—a kind of amber bead. I dropped my handkerchief so that Quex might not suspect, and I picked it up. When in my own room I examined it. It was one of the yellow holly berries.”

Mrs Ward threw herself back with a kind of unholy triumph. “Do you know what you are saying, Mr Train?” she said in a half whisper. “You are accusing Mr Brendon—”

“No! no!” Train started to his feet. Mrs Ward pulled him down again and pointed with her fan toward the boudoir.

“Hush! He might come out,” she whispered. “But can’t you see? Brendon wore the sprig in his coat on that night. He must have been in the room and have dropped the berry. What was he doing there if it was not to—”

“No,” said Train, hoarsely. “I half thought of that myself, but it is quite impossible, I tell you. He could not have got out of his room unless he had come to me.”

“How do you mean?”

“I locked the door of the sitting-room, which was between his bedroom and mine. There was no exit from his bedroom, and to get out and down the stairs he would have had to open the sitting-room



door. Now the key was under my pillow and the door was locked in the morning. No, Mrs Ward, Brendon is innocent."

"He might have stolen the key while you slept."

Train shook his head. "Impossible. I sleep very lightly, and on that night I hardly slept at all."

"Why. Was anything wrong?"

"I can't tell you that, Mrs Ward, without violating the confidence of my friend. Indeed, I have said too much. Promise me you will not speak of what I have told you."

"I promise, but I am quite sure that the holly berry was dropped by George Brendon, and that he was in Mrs Jersey's sitting-room on that night. He is the criminal."

"I tell you he is not, Mrs Ward."

"Don't excite yourself, Mr Train. Here is Mr Brendon and Dorothy." She sailed toward them with open hands. "Finished your talk. We must say good-night." And to herself she murmured, while smiling, "I've got you at last—I've got you at last." And Brendon shook hands with Madame Judas, quite unconscious of her premeditated treachery.

## CHAPTER XI

### MR BAWDSEY AT HOME

**U**NDER the rule of Miss Bull—for Margery was a mere figure-head—the house in Amelia Square was much more lively. Most of the old boarders had departed, as their nerves would not permit them to stop in a dwelling wherein a crime had been committed. Mrs Taine carried her knitting to her sister's house at Clapham, Mr Granger took the "Death of Nelson" to a boarding-house on Highgate Hill, and Harmer went to rejuvenate his antiquity at some German baths. In place of these ancient creatures came bright young men and girls who were up to date in every way. None of them minded about the crime. The house was cheap, it was now bright, and in a few months the tragedy was almost forgotten. No one would have recognized the changed atmosphere of the place, save for Miss Bull, who still sat nightly playing Patience in her favorite corner.

So little did she mind the horror of the murder that she took up her abode in Madame's sitting-room, where it had happened. She still retained her own bedroom, and Margery kept hers; but the sitting-room Miss Bull found very pleasant, for she could ask her friends into it for afternoon tea without having to mix with the too-lively boarders in the drawing-room. And the majority of them were extremely lively; so much so that Miss Bull sent several away and checked the exuberant spirits of

the others. The girls played ping-pong, the men sang music-hall ditties, and in conjunction they tried to gamble. But Miss Bull soon put a stop to that. She had no notion that the house should get a bad name after her difficulty in obtaining the lease from Lord Derrington.

Of course, in spite of the fast air which certainly pervaded the house, all things were very proper. Miss Bull was a lady and saw that things were kept decent. The boarders feared her bright black eyes and her sharp tongue, and were always glad when she retired to her sitting-room. When they waxed too noisy, the little old maid would appear like an unquiet ghost, and the clamor would die away. But Miss Bull was also liked, as she was a very affable hostess.

She was thoroughly happy now, as she had what she most desired—power; and thought, like Satan, that it was better to rule in a certain place than to serve in the higher spheres. Margery was now, as ever, her docile slave, and Miss Bull governed with a rod of iron. She dismissed some of the servants, among them Jarvey, who had bettered himself by becoming a page-boy in a West-End mansion.

Among the new boarders Miss Bull took most notice of Bawdsey, who occupied the rooms formerly inhabited by Train. On his arrival he had asked particularly for these rooms, saying that he had once lived in them when he stopped with Mrs Jersey many years before. After some thought Miss Bull remembered the man. He had boarded in the house, and had been a great favorite with Madame, but had later gone to America, and for some time had remained away. He expressed the greatest sorrow for the death of the old lady, but declared that he was very pleased with the house as managed by

Miss Bull. The little woman liked him, as his conversation was amusing and he was most polite. But had she known that he was a private inquiry agent she might not have approved of him so much. Miss Bull was a lady and drew the line at spies.

What Bawdsey was she never inquired, as she was the least curious of women. His habits were certainly eccentric, for sometimes he would remain away for a week, and at other times would stop constantly in the house. He often remained in bed for the day and had his meals brought to him. This he called his bed-cure, and stated that he suffered from nerves. He told Miss Bull quite gratuitously that he had a small income and supplemented it by taking photographs of scenery and selling them to London firms. But he declared that he was not a professional photographer. He simply traveled here and there, and photographed any scenery which struck him as pretty. The London photographers gave him good prices for these, but he stated that he merely did such artistic work for the sake of an occupation. "I am simple in my tastes," said Mr Bawdsey, "and what I have keeps me in luxury. But a man, even of my age, must be up and doing. Better to wear out than rust out."

Miss Bull assented. For the greater part of her life she had been rusting, and now that she had taken command of the house found that wearing out gave her an interest in things and prevented her from being bored. She liked to hear Bawdsey tell of his travels, and frequently asked him into her sitting-room for that purpose. He seemed to have been everywhere and to have seen everything. It appeared from his own confession that he began his travels at the early age of seventeen, when he went to Milan. And the man talked freely about himself—so freely that Miss Bull, in spite of her sus-

picious nature, never dreamed that all this chatter was for the purpose of throwing dust in her sharp eyes.

A week after the little dinner at Mrs Ward's, Bawdsey sent a note to Brendon asking him to call on a certain afternoon, and when George, anxious to continue the acquaintance, and curious to know how Bawdsey had procured his address, arrived, he was shown up to the well-known room. Bawdsey welcomed him with enthusiasm, and much in the same style as Lola did, but in a less theatrical manner.

"My preserver," said Bawdsey, shaking hands vigorously, and George laughed.

"You put me in mind of a lady I know," he said; "she uses the same term—quite unnecessarily, as it happens."

"I don't agree with you," answered Bawdsey, to the astonishment of his visitor. "When a woman is rescued from starvation she has a right to call her good Samaritan the best of names."

"Oh," said Brendon, taking a seat, "so Lola has told you."

Bawdsey nodded. "I guess so," said he, with a pronounced American twang—somewhat too pronounced, George thought. "She told me all about your visit the other night."

"Did she never speak of me before?"

"Why, of course she spoke. I tell you, sir, that the girl is just bubbling over with gratitude. And you're a good man, Mr Brendon. Yes, sir, some. You saved her and you saved me, and I sha'n't forget, and neither will she."

"Yet you said, when last we met, that she meant me harm."

"Jealousy, Mr Brendon, sheer jealousy. I heard her talking of you, and wishing to marry you, so you can guess—"

"That you wish to put me against her."

"Not exactly that," responded Bawdsey, coolly. "I wish to choke you off. You see, Mr Brendon, I love her."

"So she told me."

"Quite so, and she informed me that she had informed you. Well, I was a trifle jealous, as I'd lay down my life to make that lady Mrs Bawdsey. But when I learned that you admired and were almost engaged to Miss Ward——"

"How the devil did you find that out?" asked George.

"Without the use of the word devil," said Bawdsey, dryly. "That is a long story, Mr Brendon."

"You seem to know a great deal about me," said Brendon, nettled.

"I made it my business to find out, sir."

"Don't you think that is rather impertinent?"

"Well," drawled Bawdsey, combing his fingers through his ruddy locks, "you might put it that way if you like. A fortnight ago I should not have minded whether you thought me impertinent or not. But now that you saved my life I don't mind telling you that I wish to gain and retain your good opinion."

"Why?" asked George, more and more puzzled.

"Because I'm that rare animal—a grateful man. You have had a bad time all your life, Mr Brendon, but now you shall have a good one, and I am the man who is going to help you right along."

George looked at him helplessly. He found it difficult to understand what all this meant. "Of course I know, from what Lola said, that you are a private inquiry agent," he remarked with hesitation.

"Vidocq & Co.," said Bawdsey, briskly, "23 Augusta Street, Strand. That's me, Mr Brendon, but you needn't mention it in this shanty."

"Are you an American, Mr Bawdsey?"

"I am anything that suits. I can talk all languages, and try to tell the truth in every one. And the best day's work you ever did for yourself, Mr Brendon, was in dragging me from under the feet of that horse. Yes, sir, I'm in line with you forever."

"This is all amusing, but a trifle confusing," said Brendon, feeling that he must get to the bottom of this chatter. "Will you answer a few questions, Mr Bawdsey?"

"Yes. Fire ahead. Wait! Will you take whisky?"

"No, thanks. Yes, I'll take a cigar."

"Henry Clay," said Bawdsey, passing along a box; "and the questions?"

"You are a private inquiry agent?" asked George, when the cigar was well alight and Bawdsey had subsided into a chair.

"That's so. Vidocq & Company—an attractive title, I guess."

"And you were employed by Lola to watch me?"

"I was. Love will do anything for the object of its affections."

"Humph! there are different ways of looking at that. But you were also engaged by Lord Derrington to watch me?"

Bawdsey did not display the least surprise. "That's very creditable to your observation, Mr Brendon. It's true."

"How did Lord Derrington find out that I was passing under the name of George Brendon?"

"Well, sir, if you will shove advertisements into the paper asking about the celebration of the marriage of Percy Vane and Miss Rosina Lockwood you must expect to be dropped upon."

"Oh, that was the way you found out!"

"That was the way," nodded Bawdsey. "You had the answers——"

"I had no answers," said Brendon, quickly.

"I am quite sure of that," replied the detective, coolly. "We should have heard of you in a court of law had you been successful. But what I mean to say is that you asked for the answers to be sent to G. B., Pembroke Square, Kensington. Derrington spotted that, and seeing that the marriage referred to was that of his son to——"

George waved his hand impatiently. "I see! I see! He hired you, and you looked me up."

"Quite so. I have had you under observation for the last six months."

"Confound it," cried Brendon, uncomfortably, "and I never knew."

Bawdsey winked. "I know my business," he said. "You don't find me sending myself up on any occasion. Any more questions, sir?"

"Only one," replied George. "Will you tell me exactly what you are doing in this galley?"

"Certainly. You shall have the whole story, Mr Brendon. But in the first place I shall ask you a question in my turn. Do you know why I asked you to come and see me to-day?"

Brendon shook his head. "I have not the least idea," he confessed.

"I'll enlighten you," was the other man's reply; "to warn you that you are in danger of arrest."

"I in danger of arrest?" George jumped up. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, my meaning is clear enough. There is a chance that you may be accused of having murdered Mrs Jersey."

George dropped back into his chair with a white face. "You must be mad to say such a thing. Who accuses me?"

"Lord Derrington."

"On what grounds?"



"On certain information he obtained from Mrs Ward."

"What? Is she in it, too?"

"Very much in it. She is your bitter enemy. You see, Mr Brendon, it is not her game that you should marry the daughter. Mrs Ward knows that you are a clever man with a will of your own, and that she will not be able to twist you around her finger, which is what she wishes to do with any son-in-law who may come her way. That young fool Vane is the man she wants. He will inherit the title and a good income. Mrs Ward, should he marry the girl, will benefit. If the title and income came your way she would make very little out of the business. Consequently she will stick at nothing to get you out of the way."

"But she doesn't know that I claim to be Lord Derrington's grandson?"

"Indeed, she does," replied Bawdsey, quickly. "Derrington told her all about it."

"Why?"

"Now that," said Bawdsey, shaking his head and looking puzzled, "is one of the things I can't make out."

George thought for a moment. "I was at Mrs Ward's the other evening," he said slowly. "Lord Derrington was there. Did he know then that I was his grandson?"

"He did. He has known ever since you put the advertisement in the paper and I looked you up."

"Humph! Then he was putting me through my paces," said Brendon to himself. "What a clever man he is in concealing his thoughts. And Mrs Ward knew also who I was?"

Bawdsey nodded. "Yes. And after that evening she came to see Lord Derrington to suggest how you should be got rid of."

"Ah!" George was now perfectly cool as he saw that Bawdsey, being so frank, was ready to be his friend. "And how did she propose to do that, Mr Bawdsey? By having me arrested——"

"With the alternative that you should give up all attempts to prove your birth and go to Australia."

"And surrender my claim to Miss Ward's hand, I suppose?"

"Of course. But that would go without speaking if you went to Australia. It's a case of threatening, Mr Brendon."

"Was Lord Derrington agreeable to this suggestion?"

"Yes. He hates you, and told me to see you and put the matter to you. You have a week to think over it, and at the end of that time, Mr Brendon, if you don't leave England you will be arrested."

"No," replied Brendon, calmly, "I will not be arrested. Setting aside the fact that there is no evidence which implicates me in the crime, Lord Derrington, for his own sake, will not have his grandson arrested and his dirty linen washed in public. Whether there was a marriage or not I am his flesh and blood. Why does he hate me?"

"I can't say, sir. He never explained. But he does hate you."

"Humph! I see no reason—a man can't help his birth, and I am quite as presentable as Walter Vane."

"Much more so," said Bawdsey, quickly. "He is a fool and a miserable little beast. He sent a bracelet to Miss Velez."

"Oh! and naturally you think the worst of him. Well, it is no use my conjecturing the reason of Lord Derrington's dislike. But I can well understand why Mrs Ward wishes me out of the way. On what grounds does she accuse me of being concerned in this crime?"

"On the strength of a story related by a friend of yours, who——"

"I knew it," interrupted Brendon, starting up and beginning to pace the room. "That was why she asked Leonard Train to dinner."

"That's the man," said Bawdsey, coolly. "He occupied these rooms, I believe, and on the night of the murder you stopped with him."

"I did. In yonder bedroom. So he betrayed me?"

"My dear sir, I don't think he could help himself. Mrs Ward is as clever as the devil, and as unscrupulous. She got out of him that you had been in the sitting-room of Mrs Jersey at midnight."

"That is untrue——" began George, violently, when Bawdsey stopped him.

"So it is, to Mrs Ward, to Lord Derrington, and to the public. But so far as I am concerned, Mr. Brendon, it is a fact. You were in Mrs Jersey's room about the time she was murdered."

"How can you prove that?" asked George, quickly and very pale.

"Oh, I can prove it easily enough, and I will soon. But confess."

"That I killed the woman? No, I never laid a finger on her."

"I believe that," said Bawdsey. "If I thought you were guilty I should—no—not even then. You saved my life, and I'm grateful."

"I believe you are my friend," said George, gloomily, sitting down.

"You would have been arrested by now were I not, Mr Brendon."

"No. I tell you neither Mrs Ward nor Lord Derrington will go so far. They will try and intimidate me. But they won't succeed."

"You'll fight them?"

George set his face. "While there is breath in my body."

"I knew you were a plucky 'un," said Bawdsey, admiringly, "but you must be aware that your position is perilous."

"How so? Mr Train can prove that he locked the sitting-room door—that one there," and George pointed. "The key was under his pillow, and in the morning the door was still fast. How could I have got out to visit Mrs Jersey's room without his knowledge?"

"That is what puzzles Train and Mrs Ward and Lord Derrington," was Bawdsey's reply. "They asked me what I thought. Well——"

"One moment," interrupted Brendon. "Why does Train believe that I was in Mrs Jersey's room?"

"He found beside the table a yellow holly berry, and you wore——"

George started. "I did—I did," he muttered; "it must have been brushed off the sprig when I stooped to touch her."

"Ah!" said Bawdsey, in a voice of triumph, "then you admit you were in the room?"

"Yes, to you, but to no one else."

"I'm glad you trust me so far," said Bawdsey, genuinely pleased; "your confidence is not misplaced, Mr Brendon. And you saw Mrs Jersey?"

"I saw her body. She was dead."

"At what time was that?"

"About twelve o'clock."

"Why did you not give the alarm?"

"What?" George smiled derisively. "You think I should have put the rope round my neck?"

"No. But—well, no matter. We can talk of that later. But as to getting out of this room when the door was locked?"

"I didn't get out of this room, Mr Bawdsey. I——"

"Wait a' bit. Come into the room you slept in," said the detective, leading the way. "I have made a discovery."

The bedroom was in the same condition as when Brendon had last seen it, with the exception that the wardrobe was moved to one side. The wall at the back, which divided the room from the passage, appeared a blank, but on touching a spring a masked door opened. Shelves were revealed and it was evident that this door formed the back of a cupboard that was in the passage—a cupboard used by the housemaid, as was apparent from the dust-shovel and brooms lying within it. For a moment Bawdsey left the door open and looked at Brendon with quiet triumph. Then he snapped the door to and the wall appeared in its former blank condition. No one, without making a close examination, would have suspected the presence of that secret door. "A housemaid might open the cupboard door in the passage at any time," explained Mr Bawdsey, accounting for his action, "and it would never do for her to look through the back of the shelves into this room. She might talk, Mr Brendon, and then there would be trouble. Yes," Bawdsey rubbed his nose and looked at the astonished George, "I am sure there would be great trouble."

"I congratulate you on your cleverness, Mr Bawdsey," said Brendon when he had somewhat recovered. "You have discovered my secret. I should like to know how you discovered it."

"Well," said Bawdsey, pushing the wardrobe back to its place with an effort, "you see when I learned through the advertisement that George Brendon was the grandson of Lord Derrington I told him of it. He related your history."

"Including the murder of my father?"

"Yes, including that," replied Bawdsey with a

queer expression; "but that has nothing to do with the matter in hand, Mr Brendon."

"I'm not so sure," retorted George. "I should not be at all surprised to find that Mrs Jersey was murdered to keep her quiet on that point."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, she was in San Remo at the time my father was murdered. She loved him, and I dare say, in spite of having been discharged, watched him. She might know who the lady in blue—but I forgot, you are ignorant of all these things."

"Not at all. Don't I tell you that Lord Derrington told me the whole story? I see what you mean. You think that Mrs Jersey might know who killed your father, and for the sake of shutting her up the assassin committed the second murder."

"That is my idea," said George, coolly.

"It's ingenious, but it won't hold water. However, we can talk of that on another occasion. In the mean time I wish to tell you how I discovered the secret door."

"There's no need to. Derrington told you that I knew this house, as my grandfather had brought me up in it. When you knew through Mrs Ward that I had passed a night here, and learned through her, by means of Train, that the yellow holly berry had been found in the woman's sitting-room, you set to work to find out how I escaped from this room. You knew that Train had locked the door."

"Yes," answered Bawdsey, "he told Mrs Ward that."

"He seems to have told her everything. However, to make a long story short, you hunted for an exit and you found it."

"That's so," replied Bawdsey, quietly, "and now we had better return to the sitting-room and talk over the matter quietly."

"One moment," said George. "Have you told Lord Derrington or Mrs Ward of this discovery?"

"No, and I won't tell them, either. I wish to get you out of trouble, Mr Brendon. They haven't the least idea that you could leave the room, and the impression with them is that Train is screening you." Bawdsey shrugged his shoulders with contempt and passed George another cigar. "Just as though the man would incriminate himself if that were so."

George did not light his cigar. "Well, as you have told me so much, Mr Bawdsey, I may as well confess."

"If I am to help you I must know all."

"Then you shall know—whatever I can tell you."

George hesitated, and Bawdsey guessed that he was not going to be so frank as was necessary. However, he made no remark, and Brendon continued: "I came to this house to see Mrs Jersey and get the truth out of her. It was my intention to speak to her the next morning. However, in the drawing-room she stated that she wished the company to disperse at ten o'clock as she had business to attend to. Also she came up to this room to see if I and my friend were in bed at eleven. I guessed that she intended to see some one, and wondering if the expected person had anything to do with my business I determined to see her on that night. When Train was asleep I locked my bedroom door and made use of the cupboard."

"How did you know of its existence?"

"I lived here, as you know. This is a queer old house, full of these sort of things. I expect that door was made by some scamp so that he might be able to lead a double life."

Bawdsey nodded. "I know. Fair to the world and black to the heart."

"As a boy I discovered the cupboard," replied Brendon, not taking notice of this interruption, "and I am ashamed to say that I sometimes made use of it in my teens to go to the theater unbeknown to my grandfather. On that night I used it again, and went to the sitting-room of Mrs Jersey. It was about twelve o'clock. The door of the room was closed. I opened it, and saw her sitting at the table, dead, as she was discovered in the morning. In stooping over her to see if she still breathed, the berry must have fallen. It says a great deal for Train's acuteness that he suspected me on such evidence. I now see why he was so different to me when we parted, and why he has been so stiff of late."

"What did you do after you found that the woman was dead?"

"I returned to my bedroom and said nothing about it. You see, since I wanted something from Mrs Jersey, and that desire might have come out in the evidence, there was every chance that I would be accused of having murdered her. There was certainly motive enough."

"I don't agree with you," replied Bawdsey; "however, I quite understand that under the circumstances you lost your nerve. You returned to your room, and expressed suitable surprise the next morning."

George nodded. "Quite so; and then Train's having locked this door made me think that all was safe. Had he not told——"

"Oh, he has told very little," rejoined Bawdsey. "After all, nothing can be done if I hold my tongue."

"Nothing will be done in any case," said George, grimly, "but I thank you for warning me, Mr Bawdsey. What are you plans?"

"I have none at present. Lord Derrington asked me to watch you."



"That you certainly have done, and if you choose you can go on watching me. But why do you stop in this house?"

"Oh, I knew Mrs Jersey some years ago, and returned here for old times' sake."

George shrugged his shoulders. He felt convinced that Bawdsey was not speaking openly. But then Brendon, on his part, had held something back. Neither man was sufficiently sure of the other to be perfectly frank. But the main thing was that Bawdsey, being friendly, was content to let matters stand as they were. That is, so far as regarded George himself, for Brendon felt that the detective's presence in that house had something to do with the murder. He rose to go.

"Well, how do we stand?" asked Bawdsey.

"Much as we did before," replied George, "save that I know you will hold your tongue and not get me into trouble."

"I shall certainly do that. But remember Mrs Ward."

"Lord Derrington can stop her mouth."

"Ah, but will he?" asked Bawdsey, dubiously.

"I shall call on Lord Derrington and see," answered Brendon, and with a nod left the room.

"He's a plucked 'un," said Bawdsey.

## CHAPTER XII

### A FIRESIDE TYRANT

**L**ORD DERRINGTON should have been born Emperor of Ancient Rome or of Modern Russia. He would have made an admirable despot, as he was fairly good-humored when all about him were on their knees serving him. Even then his temper was none of the best. Those who held their own he hated, while the many who gave in to his domineering will received unmerited contempt as their reward. Even at seventy-five the old man's temper had not cooled, and the majority of people avoided him as they would the plague.

Originally he had started life with a sufficiently imperious will, and, thanks to his position as a titled and wealthy orphan, he had been enabled to exercise it at a very early age. The habit of seeing every one terrified of his mere glance grew upon him, and he became unbearable, not only to live with, but even to meet. His wife, after presenting him with two sons, had died gladly, seeing no other way of escaping her tyrant, and the report went that he had browbeaten her out of existence. Derrington would have married again for the sake of his boys, but like Henry VIII., whom he greatly resembled, he could find no one willing to endure his yoke. Consequently he became something of a woman-hater, and entered the political world. In this he met with a certain amount of opposition, which did him good, and might have been trained into a moderately de-

cent member of society but that his reformation was cut short by his being appointed ambassador to a prominent European power. Here his temper had full swing, and he bullied everybody for three years. At the end of that time he nearly caused a war and was recalled. There was some talk of his being appointed Viceroy for India, but those in power had sufficient pity on the country not to send him. Derrington, in India, would have been on "his native heath" for tyrannizing.

Failing, from his reputation, to get another appointment, Derrington took to quarreling with his sons. Percy, the elder, had a spice of the paternal temper and refused to submit. Consequently he was forbidden the house, and crowned his iniquities in the old man's eyes by marrying Rosina Lockwood. This was a severe blow to Derrington, who had the pride as well as the temper of Lucifer. He refused to hold any communication with Percy, and thus the son remained abroad, living on an income inherited from his mother until he was murdered at San Remo. As his income ceased on his death (for it reverted to his mother's relatives), George, the boy, was left dependent on the charity of his two grandfathers. Derrington denied the marriage and refused to acknowledge the infant. Lockwood took the child to his home and brought him up. Then the lad disappeared when Lockwood died, and reappeared under the name of Brendon. Derrington had discovered his grandson's identity in the way described by Bawdsey. The younger Vane was a fool, meek as Moses, and completely cowed by his terrible father. He married an equally meek lady, and the two were crushed by the old tyrant. Finally, both died, as gladly as the late Lady Derrington had done, and left Walter Vane to carry on the title. The old lord detested Walter

as a milksop, but he refused to acknowledge George, preferring the fool to the clever man, from sheer hatred of Brendon's father.

Derrington House, in St Giles Square, was an immense palatial mansion which cost no end of money to keep up, and as its lord was not over-rich he would have done better to remove to a more modest residence. But Derrington's pride would not permit him to scrimp his living, and he dwelt alone in the big house. When Walter's parents were alive they had occupied a corner, so that Derrington could bully them at his leisure, and now Walter himself remained as a whipping-boy. But he was cunning enough to keep out of his grandfather's way, and contrived to be more independent than his parents had been. Perhaps Derrington was too old to carry on an active war, but he certainly gave Walter more license than he had ever accorded to any human being. A good deal of contempt for the weak little dandy had to do with this permitting him to act as he pleased. There is no excitement in whipping a sheep.

The meeting with George at Mrs Ward's had touched the old man nearly. He had never set eyes on Percy's son before, and had no idea that the young fellow was so handsome and clever. Derrington felt that he could take some pride in George, as a man who would not permit himself to be bullied. He had as strong a will as his grandfather, and the older man respected him. Moreover, George's refusal to accept an income when he took a feigned name, and his determined fight for his birthright, pleased the despot. But for his pride and hatred of the father, Derrington might have acknowledged the marriage. He knew in his own mind that such a marriage had taken place, and that George was legitimate, but he did not know where the ceremony

had been celebrated. The sole evidence he possessed was a letter, written by Percy from Paris, stating that he had married Rosina Lockwood. Derrington at the time accepted the fact, and had never thought of inquiring about details from his son, and of course when Percy died it was too late. Mrs Jersey knew, and Mrs Jersey had made use of her knowledge, but she never told Derrington anything. Had she done so, her hold over him might have waxed feeble, although, owing to her knowledge, and to the old man's determination not to acknowledge George, it could not be done away with altogether.

The library in Derrington House was a vast and splendid apartment with a magnificent collection of books. Its owner, driven back on himself by his misanthropic detestation of his species, and the dislike his fellow-men had for him, read a great deal. Sometimes he wrote articles for the quarterlies, principally on political questions. He went out into society in spite of his age, out of sheer contrariety and not because he enjoyed himself. Like *Vespasian*, he was determined to die standing, and showed himself at several great houses, at race-meetings, at Hurlingham, and sometimes in the House. His movements were carefully chronicled in the *Morning Post*, and he took care to let his friends know that he was still alive. For the rest, he sat in his library reading, or writing his memoirs. These he had arranged to have published after his death, and there were many families who would have given much money to have seen them behind the fire. Derrington had known every one worth knowing for the last half-century, and had as bitter a pen as he had a tongue. Also, he knew many secrets of diplomacy. So it may be guessed that many great families did not look forward to the publication of these memoirs with

particular pleasure. Derrington knew this, and chuckled grimly, much as Heine did in the like case.

One afternoon he was adding a chapter to the book, when a card was brought to him. Derrington nearly jumped from his seat when he read the name of George Brendon. At first he was inclined to tear up the card and send the pieces out to the insolent young man who thus dared to trespass on his privacy. But on second thoughts he decided to accord him an interview. He knew that by this time Mr Bawdsey must have informed George that his grandfather knew him as Brendon, and the old autocrat wished to see if George would behave as pluckily at their second interview as he had done at the first. Moreover, he could not forget the good looks and clever conversation of the young man. It would be absurd to say that Derrington's heart yearned over this unacknowledged twig of the family tree, for according to common report he had no heart. But he certainly felt an unwonted emotion when Brendon, tall and handsome, composed and ready for battle, stepped into the room. Derrington knew that the young man was ready for battle, for he saw the light of war in his eyes.

When the door was closed and the two were alone, Derrington took his station on the hearth-rug with an impassive expression of countenance. He waited for George to open the war of words, and after a polite greeting he waited in silence. George was not at all embarrassed. He knew perfectly well that he had a difficult task before him, and did not choose to shirk it. With the family obstinacy he was determined on obtaining his birthright, and if he set all London alight with scandal he was bent upon gaining his end. The two men stared coolly at one another like two fencers, but at the outset the but-tons were off the foils.

"I am sure you are not surprised to see me, Lord Derrington," said Brendon with his eyes fixed on the old man's grim face.

"Not half so surprised as you were at seeing Bawdsey," said Derrington, not to be outdone in coolness.

George smiled. "I was not at all surprised at seeing the man," he said calmly. "It was my happy lot to rescue him from an accident, and it was my intention to call on him."

"For what reason?" asked Derrington, who could not help betraying astonishment, in spite of his self-control.

"You must excuse my not answering that question."

"Oh, certainly," replied Lord Derrington, with ironical politeness; "but you are not so diplomatic as I thought."

"Because I decline a reply?"

"Because you allow me to see that you are on good terms with the man I employ. A clever diplomatist would have allowed me to think that Bawdsey was hostile and so have used the man against me."

"There is no need for me to stoop to such crooked ways," said Brendon, with some scorn, "and I always find the truth tells in the long run."

"Ah! You've never been an ambassador."

"When I am, I shall still tell the truth."

Derrington smiled grimly. "Oh, then, it is your intention to enter political life?"

"I think we discussed that fully the other evening."

Derrington sat down and leaned his elbows on the table. His temper was rising, as he was not accustomed to be treated in this off-hand way. "Come, sir, let us understand one another. State the situ-

ation so as to clear the ground for a proper argument."

"Certainly," said George, with frigid politeness. "You know who I am, I understand."

"No, I don't. So far as I know you are George Brendon. I met you at Mrs Ward's, and——"

"And were good enough to hold a long conversation with me," finished George, smartly. "I see, sir, it is necessary for me to be explicit."

"It's the best course," rejoined Derrington, looking at him with hard eyes and secretly admiring his self-control.

"Then I have to state that my name is George Vane, and that I am the son of Percy Vane and Rosina Lockwood."

"Indeed! What proof have you of this?"

"The evidence of my nurse, Jane Fraser, who attended to me when my father, your eldest son, was alive. The testimony of my former guardian, Mr Ireland, who took charge of me after the death of my mother's father. Finally, my certificate of birth, which I will show you whenever you choose."

Derrington was confounded by this calm answer. He would have blustered, but George's politeness gave him no chance of losing his temper, and without fuel it would not blaze up. "You seem to be well provided with proofs," said he, grimly. "Let us admit, for the sake of argument, that you are my grandson. But the marriage——"

"Ah, that is the difficult point! And it is unpleasant for me to talk of the subject. In justice to the memory of my mother I hold that there was a marriage."

"And in justice to my family I hold that there was none."

"In that case, Lord Derrington, we join issue."

"You are quite a lawyer, sir," sneered the old man.



"I thought of studying for the bar at one time."

"Indeed, and why did you not?"

"I had no money to pay my fees," said George, coldly.

The old lord winced. He could not but admire his pluck, and, aware that the young fellow was his own flesh and blood, regretted that he should lack any chance of embarking on what promised to be a brilliant career. "You could have had money had you chosen," said he, roughly.

"I know. For that reason I changed my name to Brendon."

"Well," said Derrington, irritably, "let us come to the point. You say you are my grandson. I admit that, as I am aware of what evidence you can bring forward. But I decline to admit that you are my heir. The onus of proof lies with you."

"I am prepared to discover the proof if your lordship will behave in an honorable manner."

"What!" roared Derrington, rising with a fierce look. "Do you mean to say, you jackanapes, that I am behaving dishonorably?"

"Extremely so," said Brendon, coldly. "You have had me watched by a detective; you threaten, through him, to have me arrested for a crime of which I am innocent, if I do not give up my attempts to gain my birthright and—" here George leaned forward—"Dorothy Ward. Do you call these actions honorable?"

"How dare you?—how dare you?" was all that Derrington could say.

"You should know how I dare, sir, considering I am your grandson."

"I'll have you thrown out of the house."

George rose. "I am willing to leave you, sir, if that is the tone you take. But as to being thrown out, that is quite another question."

"Do you know who I am?" questioned the other, blustering.

"Very well. You are the man who is keeping me out of my rights."

"I am not!"

"I say you are."

The two faced one another without blenching. Derrington tried to cow George, and George refused to be cowed. It was the old lord's eyes which fell first. Brendon had youth as well as will on his side, and these dominated Derrington. For the first time in his tyrannical life he gave way.

"There is no need for you to go yet," he grunted, flinging himself into a seat. "I am willing to hear what you have to say."

Brendon sat down also. "I don't think I have any more to say."

"Then why did you come here?"

"To ask you if you consider it honorable to threaten me. I have already done so. There is no more to be said on my part."

Derrington dug a pen viciously into the blotting-pad. He did not know very well what to say. Had George sworn and blustered he might have been able to talk him down and to bully him into giving way. But Brendon was perfectly calm and polite. He was not to be intimidated in any way, and the ordinary methods would not do in this case. Derrington was reduced to reason. "What is it you wish?"

"I wish you to recognize my mother's marriage and to state that I am your heir."

"Anything else?" sneered Derrington.

"Yes. You will publicly recognize me; you will allow me an income sufficient to maintain the dignity of my real name of George Vane, and you will order Mrs Ward to keep silent."

"Mrs Ward? What have I to do with her?"

"A great deal, apparently. You told her my story, and as she does not want me to marry her daughter she will move heaven and earth to ruin me by using her knowledge."

"How can she ruin you?"

"I think you understand, sir. The story told by my friend Train——"

"Friend! Judas, rather."

"No. He is only a weak man who is as wax in the hands of a clever and pretty woman. But Mrs Ward got sufficient out of him to place me in a somewhat perilous position."

"Were you in the room where the woman was murdered? Speak plainly."

"I came on here purposely to speak plainly," rejoined Brendon, dryly, "for your safety as well as for my own."

"Safety, sir!" Derrington grew crimson. "What the devil do you mean?"

"I mean that I can speak freely to you, as I know perfectly well that for the honor of our family——"

"Our family—confound you!"

"Our family," repeated George, "of which some day I hope to be the head. For its honor, I say, you will not take these matters into court. I was in the room of Mrs Jersey. I saw her dead!"

"And you know who killed her?"

"No. I can't say that for certain." George looked keenly at his grandfather. The old man appeared uneasy. Suddenly Brendon spoke. "I should like to know what you were doing in Mrs Jersey's house on the night she was murdered?"

Derrington dashed down his pen furiously and rose. "You go too far, sir; you go too far!" he roared.

"Not any further than you intended to go. If

you threaten me I have a right to protect myself."

"In what way?"

"By telling you that if I am in a perilous position, you are also."

"Do you mean to say that I murdered the woman?"

"By no means," said Brendon, quickly. "I should not think of doing such a thing. But I do say you were in that house after eleven."

"I was not," panted the old nobleman, savagely, and glared at his grandson with bloodshot eyes.

"You were," insisted Brendon; "there is no need to tell you how I got out of my bedroom unbeknown to Train, but I did. I came downstairs to see Mrs Jersey at half-past eleven or thereabouts. I crept down the stairs and saw you standing in the light of the hall lamp. You had on a fur coat, and I recognized you by your unusual height. Also by the color of your coat. Some months before you wore that coat—it is a claret-colored one trimmed with sable—at a race-meeting. You were pointed out to me, and it was the first time I had set eyes on you. It was you in the hall."

"Did you see my face?" asked Derrington.

"No. But the coat and the height, and my knowledge that you were connected with Mrs Jersey—"

"I wasn't connected with the jade," flashed out Derrington. "She came to me years ago and said she could prove the marriage. I tried to get out of her the name of the church where it took place. She refused to give it, and said if I did not pension her off she would go to your guardian, Ireland, and get him to help her to prove that you were legitimate. I hated your father, sir, and as to your mother—"

"No," cried Brendon, rising, "not a word against my mother."

"Only this, that she was not well-born. The daughter of a music-master. Not the wife for my son."

"She was his wife, however. Leave my mother's name out of it and go on, sir. You say that Mrs Jersey could have proved the marriage."

"Yes," growled Derrington, rather cowed by Brendon's manner. "I did not wish her to do so, for the reasons I have stated."

"Very unworthy reasons," said George, coldly.

"You know nothing about it, sir," flamed out the old man, slapping his hand on the table. "My family is as old as the Conquest."

"As the future head of it I am glad to hear that."

Derrington looked as though he could have struck George, who simply made the remark to punish him for his insolence. "Never mind that," said he, controlling his temper. "I bought that house from your mother's father—the music-master," he sneered, "and gave it to Mrs Jersey rent free. I also allowed her an annuity. She held her tongue for many years. Then she saw that confounded advertisement in the papers and threatened to tell you the truth on the chance of getting more money out of you when I was dead. I refused, and she then told me that she had written out a confession—"

"I thought as much," interrupted George. "But that has been stolen."

"By whom?"

"By the assassin."

"And who is the assassin?"

"I can't say. But if use is made of that confession either you or I will learn who killed Mrs Jersey."

"Why you or I?"

"Because we alone can make use of the confession and pay money for it. The thing would be no use to any one else. But I now understand Mrs Jersey's

possession of the house. Were you in it on that night?"

Derrington looked at Brendon and hesitated. Then in strange contradiction to his usual manner, he turned away his face. "I decline to answer that question," he growled.

"But I saw you," insisted George.

"You saw—there is nothing more to be said. Hold your tongue."

"Willingly," said George, politely, "if you will silence Mrs Ward."

"I have no influence with the woman."

"Oh, I think so. She wishes Dorothy to marry my cousin."

"Your cousin!"

"Can you deny the relationship?"

Derrington shirked the question by assenting to Brendon's request. "I may be able to make Mrs Ward hold her tongue," he growled.

"I am quite sure she will do anything you tell her, in the hope that you will approve of a match between my cousin and her daughter."

"And you wish me to approve?" sneered the old man.

"As to that, it matters little. Mrs Ward wishes Dorothy to be Lady Derrington and to have your very excellent income. Whether she marries me or Vane it comes to the same thing. I can't understand Mrs Ward's dislike and mischief-making since that is the case."

"I can," snapped Derrington. "You are too clever for her, and Walter is a fool."

"Perhaps so. However, as I shall marry Dorothy it doesn't much matter."

"How can you marry her situated as you are?"

"I shall be George Vane some day, sir, and then Dorothy will be my wife."

"I believe she will," muttered Derrington, looking at the firm face of the young man. "Humph! So you intend to look for the certificate of marriage?"

"No, for the confession of Mrs Jersey; afterward for the church which will be mentioned in that confession. The register will prove the marriage without the necessity of the certificate. I shouldn't wonder, though," added Brendon, "if Mrs Jersey had stolen that from my mother when she died."

"Mrs Jersey was jade enough for anything," said Derrington.

"Well, she is dead, and there is no use saying bad about her."

"How will you set to work to get that certificate?"

George wrinkled his brows. "There is only one way, sir. I must find out who killed Mrs Jersey. If you can help me——"

"I can't. I know no more who murdered the woman than you do."

"Yet you were in the house on that night."

Derrington grew wrathful. "Don't talk rubbish, sir. If I was, I should not mind admitting the fact. As it is——" He broke off, gnawing his lip and avoiding Brendon's eyes.

That the old man knew something vital to the case Brendon was certain; that he would never confess what it was George felt perfectly sure. He abandoned the point, as he did not wish to make Lord Derrington incriminate himself, and he might do so. Brendon was satisfied that he had seen him in the house on the night when Mrs Jersey was murdered.

"There is no more to be said," he remarked, taking up his hat.

"No. Except that I'll give you a fair chance of

finding the church. Bawdsey shall watch you no more."

"Thank you. And Mrs Ward?"

"She shall be made to hold her tongue."

George bowed. "I am obliged to you, sir. I now see that you intend to fight fairly. Good-day," and he departed.

Derrington stood where he was, in deep thought. Suddenly he struck a mighty blow on the desk. "By Heaven, he's a man after my own heart!" said the old scamp. "He shall be my heir, he shall marry that girl; but to exercise his wits he shall fight every inch of the way to attain his ambition."



## CHAPTER XIII

### A WOMAN SCORNED

**D**OROTHY was by no means of a jealous disposition. Moreover, her love for George was so deep and pure that she trusted him entirely. Nevertheless, having learned from the few words dropped by Vane, that Brendon knew Lola, she felt desirous of seeing the woman. That Lola was her rival she never for one moment believed, as she knew Vane's malicious nature and evil tongue. But the fact remained that Brendon's name was coupled with that of the dancer, and this incipient scandal annoyed Miss Ward.

There was no need for her to ask George why such a report should prevail, for she knew that he would be able to explain in a satisfactory manner, and, trusting him already, it was useless to demand details. Her feelings would remain the same after the telling of his story as they were now, therefore she avoided the disagreeable subject. Nevertheless, she was woman enough to desire a sight of Lola, and induced her mother to take her to the music-hall. Mrs Ward was very pleased to do so, but she was too clever to hint that she guessed Dorothy's reason for making this request.

"Certainly, my dear," she said briskly. "I am very glad that you are coming out of your shell. Men hate a woman who can't talk of everything, and nothing is talked about but Lola."

"I must educate myself to please men, then," said Dorothy, dryly, "so I may as well begin with the dancer. On what night can we go?"

"Oh, Friday will do. Mr Vane has invited us to dine at the Cecil, so I'll ask him to get us a box."

Dorothy would rather have gone with any one than with Mr Vane, as she disliked his feeble attempts at lovemaking. However, there was nothing for it but to accept, since she had brought it on herself. With a smile which encouraged her mother to think she would behave sensibly toward Vane, she agreed to the proposed dinner-party and companionship, and Mrs Ward wrote a note at once.

"I hope when she sees Lola, and hears the stories about that Brendon man, that she may refuse to have anything more to do with him," was Mrs Ward's remark as she sealed her note. "I don't want to get the Brendon man into trouble by having him arrested for the murder. And I don't think Derrington would let me if I did wish it."

Her last speech was prophetic, for the next day Lord Derrington paid a visit to Curzon Street and had a short interview with Mrs Ward, the gist of which was that she must hold her tongue.

"Brendon called to see me the other day," explained Derrington, looking grim, "and he showed me plainly that he had nothing to do with the matter."

"But how about the holly berry?"

"That is easily explained," replied Derrington, who, anticipating the question, had prepared an answer. "Brendon was one of the first to see the body, and in touching it the berry fell from the sprig. Afterward—mind you, afterward—Mr Train found the berry, and, not knowing that Brendon had seen the body that morning, thought he had been in the room on the previous night."

"I'm sure he was," insisted Mrs Ward.

"You are sure of nothing of the sort. Brendon

could not have got downstairs without the connivance of Train, and you heard what Train said."

"He is such a fool!"

"The more likely to tell the truth," said Derrington. Then he asked, after a pause, "Why did you tell Dorothy to give the sprig of holly to Brendon on that night?"

Mrs Ward shrugged her shoulders and looked down nervously. "Oh, it was the merest kindness on my part," she said, trying to speak quietly. Derrington contradicted her at once.

"It was nothing of the sort," he declared with roughness. "You wished him to have the yellow holly in his coat when he saw Mrs Jersey, so that the woman might betray herself."

"I knew nothing about Mrs Jersey at the time."

"Oh, but you did! With regard to the holly, you knew from me how it was used in connection with the death of my son at San Remo; and what I did not tell you, you learned from other people."

Mrs Ward looked defiant. "Well, I did. I am sure every one knew about the murder at the time," she said, "and I met some old frumps who gave me all details."

"I quite understand that; but how did you know about Mrs Jersey?"

"That's my business," cried Mrs Ward, becoming imprudent. "You are right about the holly; I sent to Devonshire expressly to get some. It was my intention to inclose a sprig in a letter to Mrs Jersey so as to frighten her——"

"What good would that have done?"

"My business again," snapped Mrs Ward, becoming bolder. "I had my reason for wishing to recall your son's death to her mind, and I knew that the *yellow holly* would do so most successfully. When *Dorothy came from the Park* and told me that

Brendon was to stop with his friend at Mrs Jersey's boarding-house, I thought that it would be better to let George wear the sprig. And I managed it in such a way that neither Dorothy nor George guessed how I planned the business. And I succeeded. Mrs Jersey saw the sprig and nearly fainted. I knew then that—" Here she stopped.

Derrington saw that it was useless to question her further. She would only lie, and had been telling lies, for all he knew. Moreover, he did not think she could tell him anything pertinent to the case.

"I shall ask you nothing more," he said, rising to take his leave. "You have some reason for all this intrigue, I have no doubt. What your intentions are, matters little to me. I came merely to warn you that Brendon is to be left alone."

"You won't have him arrested?"

"No. And what is more, I won't have him spoken about in connection with that crime."

Mrs Ward forgot her desire to conciliate Derrington, forgot her desire to marry Vane to Dorothy, forgot everything in a sudden access of rage. "I shall do what I choose!" she cried.

"No," said Derrington, quietly, and looking her full in the face, "you will obey me."

"Obey you, Lord Derrington?"

"Yes. I have tried to conduct this interview quietly, Mrs Ward, and to hint that your wiser plan is to be silent, but—"

"I don't want hints. I wish for plain speaking," raged the little woman. "How dare you address me like this?"

The old gentleman leaned forward suddenly and whispered a short sentence in her ear. Mrs Ward's face turned pearly white and she tottered to a chair, closing her eyes as she fell into it. Derrington surveyed her with a pitiless expression.

"You will be silent about Brendon?" he asked.

"Yes," moaned Mrs Ward. "I will say nothing."

When Derrington departed Mrs Ward retired to bed after canceling her engagements for the evening. For twenty-four hours she stopped there, explaining to Dorothy that she was taking a rest cure. It apparently did her good, for on the evening of the day appointed for the meeting at the Cecil she arose looking bright and quite herself again. She had quite got over the fright given to her by Derrington, and, when she saw him later, treated him quite in her old manner. On his side the old gentleman made no difference, but he wondered how she was carrying herself so boldly. At once it occurred to his suspicious mind that there was some reason for this defiant behavior, and he determined to watch her. For this purpose he joined the party.

"It is the first time I have been to a music-hall for years," he explained to Dorothy; "but Walter has been talking so much about this new dancer that I felt I must see her."

"Why did you not dine with us at the Cecil?" asked Dorothy.

"I always prefer to dine at home, my dear young lady. Besides, it does not do for an old man to wag his gray beard uninvited among the young."

Meantime Mrs Ward was chatting amicably to Vane and to a vapid War-Office clerk, who had formed a fourth at the Cecil dinner-party. He was a titled clerk, and heir to great estates, so Mrs Ward made much of him. She was very diplomatic, and never neglected younger sons. "One never knows but what they may be rich some day," said Mrs Ward in explanation of her wisdom.

The box was large and easily held the party. Mrs Ward had a position directly in front, where she

could see and be seen; but Dorothy kept herself behind the curtains. She could see the stage excellently, but did not wish to be recognized by any chance acquaintance. In an opposite box sat a red-haired man in immaculate evening-dress. Derrington recognized him as Bawdsey, but did not think it necessary to show his recognition. He sat at the back of the box between Vane and the War-Office clerk, and kept a watchful eye on Mrs Ward.

That little woman sparkled like a diamond. She criticised the house, admired the decorations, and applauded the comic songs. It might have been that this indifferent attitude was one of defiance, as she must have known that Derrington was watching her. But she acted her part consummately, and he could not help admiring her coolness. "What an admirable actress," thought the old lord, "and what a dangerous woman!"

The ballet of "The Bacchanals" came at the end of the first part of the programme. When the curtain rose Dorothy was so anxious to behold Lola that she leaned forward so as to show her face to the whole house. Bawdsey saw her and put his glass to his eyes. He smiled slightly, and Derrington wondered why he did so. But at that moment, and while the stage was filling with dancers, he arose to receive some newcomers. These were none other than Miss Bull and Margery, for whom Bawdsey had procured the box. The little old maid was whiter than ever and wore her usual gray dress. Margery was smartly gowned in green, and with her light hair and stupid red face looked anything but beautiful. She placed herself in the best position, being evidently directed to do so by Miss Bull, for that lady preferred the shade. At all events, she secluded herself behind a curtain and kept her beady black eyes persistently on the stage. On see-

ing that the two were comfortable, Bawdsey disappeared, and did not return till the end of the ballet. Derrington saw all this, but no one else in Mrs Ward's box took any notice. And why should they? Bawdsey and his party were quite unknown to them.

The ballet was modeled closely on the lines laid down by Euripides in his tragedy. The opening scene was the market-place of Thebes, and the stage was filled mostly with men. Pentheus, the King, is informed that the whole female population of the city, together with his mother, Agavé, have gone to the mountains to worship a stranger. The seer, Tiresias, knows by his psychic powers that the stranger is none other than Bacchus, the god of wine, and implores Pentheus not to provoke his enmity. The King spurns this advice and gives orders that the so-called god shall be arrested. It was at this moment that Agavé appears. Dorothy looked at her eagerly.

Agavé has not yet assumed her Bacchanalian garb. She is still in the quiet dress of a Grecian matron, but her gestures are wild, and she is rapid in her movements. In the dance which followed she is interrupted by Pentheus, who strives to calm her frenzy. But Agavé, knowing the god of wine is at hand, becomes as one possessed. Bacchus appears and is arrested by Pentheus. He is chained and hurried into the palace. Agavé warns the King against the impiety he is committing. Pentheus defies the gods. There is a peal of thunder, and the palace of Pentheus sinks into ruins. At the back appears the ruins of the city walls, which have also fallen, and on the summit of the heaped stones stands Bacchus, the god confest. At a wave of his wand vines begin to clamber over the ruins, and the cries of the Bacchanalians are heard. Pentheus *tries to seize the god again, and darkness covers*

the stage. The last thing seen was Lola dancing in a wild red light, with extravagant gestures.

Dorothy could not say that Lola was handsome, but she had about her a wild grace which was very fascinating. When dancing she seemed to think of nothing but the revels in which she was engaged. She never cast a look at the house, and Dorothy noticed this. She was therefore somewhat surprised when, during the second scene, she saw Lola deliberately look in the direction of the box and stare at her piercingly for quite a moment or two. Rather confused by this sudden regard, the girl drew back. Lola noticed her no more, but continued to dance.

The second scene was the camp of the Bacchanals, where Pentheus, as a follower of the god, comes to see the orgies. It was a mountainous scene with a lurid red sky broken by masses of black clouds. There is no need to describe the ballet in detail. The frenzied dancers of the Bacchanals seemed to send the audience wild. There was something fierce and murderous about these orgiastic movements. And through the wild throng darted Lola, in leopard-skin and garlands, bearing a cup of wine, and flinging herself about in wild madness. She appeared to be a devil, and Dorothy shrank back at the sight of her wild face. The music also was terrible, and excited the dancers to further efforts of madness. It was a feast of witches, a Walpurgis night, a revel of the earth-powers. There was nothing spiritual about this riot of the flesh; the audience shuddered at the fierce rapture of the dancers, at the alluring pain of the music, at the reckless abandon of Lola Velez.

"It's too awful!" murmured Dorothy, moving to the back of the box, beside Derrington; "that woman is a demon."



"Yet your friend Mr Brendon helped her to this position," said the old man, grimly.

"I am sure he cannot approve of this dancing," shuddered the girl, who was very pale.

"There is nothing improper about it," said Derrington.

"No. Everything is right in that way; but it is maddening, and unholy, and altogether terrible. The music is something like that in Tannhäuser—cruel, evil, voluptuous."

"Ah, your poor spiritual nature shrinks from that sort of thing! But Mrs Ward seems to enjoy it."

She certainly did. Craning forward so as to get a full view of the stage, Mrs Ward's eyes were alight. She would have enjoyed being in the throng herself, and would have danced as madly as the worst of them. And queerly enough Miss Bull appeared also spellbound. Her face was flushed, her eyes glittered, and her breath came and went in quick pants. "It's wonderful, Margery," she said, leaning out of the box and fixing her eyes intently on the whirling mass.

"It's very pretty," said Margery, stupidly. Her dull brain could not understand the wild madness of the scene, and she was as unmoved as though she had been listening to a sermon.

"Dorothy! Dorothy!" whispered Mrs Ward, "come back to your seat. Lola juggles the head of Pentheus. It is the great dance."

"No," answered Dorothy, and clung to Derrington's arm. "I will stop here. It is too terrible."

The old man understood, and in the darkness of the box he slipped his arm round her. In that kind embrace Dorothy felt safe. If she looked upon that madness again she felt that she must cry out. Derrington quite appreciated her feelings. It was *the repulsion* experienced by the spiritual against *the material*.

The action of the ballet proceeded rapidly. Pentheus climbed a tree, the Bacchanalians surrounded it and dragged him down. Lola emerged from a frantic crowd bearing his head. Then began the dance, slowly at first with solemn paces and stately gestures. The limelights, red and blue and green and yellow, were flashed on the swaying form of Lola as she eyed the head with terrible glances. Then the music flashed out into a wild galop. The scene became pandemonium. Lightning flashed, thunder rolled, the violins shrieked in the orchestra, the dancers spun, whirled, plunged, and sprang and bounded, and frantically rushed about the stage. Everywhere at unexpected moments Lola appeared, tossing, smiting, and caressing the head of Pentheus, whirling out and in as the rainbow lights played upon her restless figure. Finally, when the orgy was at its height, came a flash of lightning, a crash of thunder, the riot died away, the Bacchanalians sprang from the stage. Darkness descended, the music sank to lulling tones, and quiet, silvery moonlight flooded the stage. There alone, in the center, sat Agavé, restored to her right mind, weeping over the head of her son. And on this scene of sorrow the curtain fell slowly to the strains of sweet music. The audience drew long breaths and felt as though a nightmare were at an end.

"Let us go now," said Dorothy, standing up and still clinging to Derrington's arm. "I wish I had not come."

She was interrupted by an ejaculation from her mother. Mrs Ward also was standing up, but her eyes were fixed on Miss Bull. The little old maid, as though feeling the influence of that glance, slowly looked in Mrs Ward's direction. The eyes of the two women met. From those of Miss Bull flashed a look of hate, and she withdrew behind the cur-

tain of the box. Mrs Ward was white and shaking. Clutching Vane's arm she requested to be taken to her carriage. "It is too much for me," she said, alluding to the ballet.

Derrington stood on the pavement when the brougham rolled away bearing the mother and daughter, both silent, both pale. He was alone, as Vane and the War-Office clerk were back again in the hall. "Humph!" said Derrington, his eyes fixed on the retreating carriage. "So you know that little woman who called to see me about the lease. I wonder how that comes about. Miss Bull knew Mrs Jersey, and you, Mrs Ward, sent that yellow holly. I wonder——" The old man stopped; he could not quite understand what Mrs Ward was doing, but he repeated his former observation. "A dangerous woman," said he. "I shall speak to Bawdsey about her;" and making up his mind to this he went in search of the detective.

All that night Dorothy was haunted by strange dreams, in which the figure of Lola played a prominent part. Usually calm and self-possessed, Dorothy slept like a child, but the fierce music, the mad dancing, the knowledge that George knew this terrible woman—for so she appeared to the girl—caused her to sleep brokenly. She was up early, and after a breakfast that was a mere farce she took her way to the Park. It was her usual custom to walk in a lonely part about eight o'clock in the morning but on this occasion she was at her usual spot by half-past seven. This was a seat under a spreading tree in the center of a wide lawn. Few people came there at so early an hour, and Dorothy often read for an hour before returning home. In a mechanical manner she took a book out of her pocket—it was the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius—and tried to *fasten her attention* on the soothing words of the

stoic Emperor. But it was impossible. Before her inner vision passed the wild, flushed face of Lola Velez, and Dorothy could not drive it away. While endeavoring to do so some one came to sit on the seat. Dorothy, rather surprised, looked up. She saw Lola staring at her intently.

The dancer looked pale and worn. About her there was none of the unholy influence of the previous night. As the morning was cold she wore a sealskin coat and toque with a scarf of red silk twisted round her throat. This touch of color was all that was about her likely to suggest her foreign origin. With her pale face and piteous mouth and appealing eyes she looked like a broken-hearted woman. Dorothy's first movement was to go away; but when she saw the sorrow on that wild face she remained where she was. The two gazed at one another for a time, and the thought in the mind of each was the same. Both thought of George Brendon.

Lola began to speak without any preamble. "Mr Bawdsey pointed you to me at the last night," she said in her imperfect English. "He declared you did walk early, and I have been with my eye on your mansion since six hours—what you call o'clock. I see you come, I follow you, I am here, Mees Vard, I am here."

"What do you want?" asked Dorothy, calmly, her nerves much more under control than Lola's were. Yet both were agitated.

"Ah," cried the foreign woman, throwing back her head, "give him to me! I love him—I worship him. Give him to me."

"Of whom do you speak, mademoiselle?"

"Ah, mademoiselle, so he speaks when angry. But I am no French. I am Señora—I am Spanish. I have warm blood here in my heart." She struck

her breast fiercely. "And if you take him from me I will kill you. Yes, I will give you the death—quick, sure, sudden."

Her face drew near to Dorothy's as she spoke, and the girl could feel her hot breath on her cheek. But Dorothy had a brave heart of her own and did not flinch. For all she knew, Lola might intend to stab her at the very minute. The Park keeper was some distance away, and it was useless to create a scandal by calling him to her assistance. Lola was just the kind of mad creature to make a scene. Retaining control of herself, though her heart was beating rapidly, Dorothy fixed her eyes firmly on those of Lola. "Sit a little further away," she said, "and we will talk calmly."

"Are you not afraid?" asked Lola, surprised. She had always found the savage attitude so effective.

Dorothy laughed. "I was never afraid of anything or of any one in my life," she said coolly. "And I am not going to begin now. What do you want, mademoiselle? Why do you threaten me?"

"Bah!" cried the other, but moving back a little as requested, "you know, you blond white cat, you. It is George."

"What about George?"

"He is mine. He loves me. You would take him from me."

"If you are speaking of George Brendon——"

"Of who else should I speak? You know—ah, you know!"

"Yes. I know. I heard some rumors as to how he helped you. But I do not believe for one moment that he loves you."

"He does. You dare ask that he loves."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. We may as well *understand* one another, as you have no right to *thrust yourself upon me.*"

"I do do what I do please," said Lola, sullenly.

"These sorts of things are not allowed in England. I am sorry for you, and so I speak. Otherwise, I should call the Park keeper."

"I want not any sorrow. I do want my own George."

"Mr Brendon is engaged to marry me," said Dorothy, deliberately.

Lola sprang to her feet with flashing eyes. "It will not be," she almost shouted. "I love him."

"Sit down," said Dorothy, much in the same tone as she would have used to a fractious child, and Lola resumed her seat immediately. The woman was a creature of impulse. Had Dorothy raged also, she would have gained the ascendancy. But this calmness, to use a nautical simile, "took the wind out of her sails." She could only do as she was told.

"But I will have my George," she muttered.

"Listen to me," said Dorothy, quietly. "I have no right to answer your questions. But I am sorry for you. I will speak to Mr Brendon."

"No—" Lola looked up in terror—"you must not do that. He will be very angry—oh, much—much enraged."

"Then that shows me you have been speaking untruths. Mr Brendon does not love you—"

"But I say yes—yes—yes!" Lola sprang to her feet again and poured forth her wrath. "Ah, you think he will be milord and that you will marry him, but—"

"What do you know about that?" asked Dorothy, rising indignantly.

"Oh, I do know much—much," Lola snapped her fingers. "Yes, I know that which I do know. I can stop him from being milord, and that I will—I will. If he is milord he will marry—you—you. *But as my own George he will make me—me—*" she

struck her breast again—"me, Lola Velez, madame his wife."

"You are talking nonsense," said Dorothy, coolly, though she felt annoyed and puzzled. "What can you know?"

"That which I do know. Wait—oh, wait a day—one day, two day, three day, and then——" She snapped her fingers. "You see—yes—you see how clever I am. I go, I go, you white cat. I go to get my George."

Lola darted away at a run, which slackened to a rapid walk as she neared the Park gates. Dorothy sat down again, too amazed to follow.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MRS WARD'S TRUMP CARD

**K**OWLASKI was a large, fat, good-natured blackguard of a man, quite without principle. He came from some remote village in the Balkans and was of Jewish birth.

In his early days he arrived in London penniless and strove to make a living by selling toys in the street. Then he turned scene-shifter at a music-hall, and while thus engaged educated himself to write and read and to speak English with wonderful fluency. Also he saved money and speculated in a small way, having the marvelous Hebrew instinct of picking out lucrative ventures. Shortly he became stage manager. Then he found a clever woman who sang badly and actly wonderfully. Kowlaski advertised her into a success and she proved grateful. There is no need to trace his steady rise; but one thing led to another until he became proprietor of the very music-hall which had witnessed his humble beginning.

When he first set eyes on Lola he had guessed that it would pay to invest money in her. The success of the ballet proved that Kowlaski was right as usual, and he smiled his oily smile when he saw the crowded houses and looked over the receipts. The ballet would run for more than a year. He was sure of that, and set about some other business now that the music-hall was flourishing. It was at this point that Lola demanded a week's holiday. Kowlaski whimpered. He usually did so



to make people think he was weak. But under his apparent weakness he was possessed of an iron strength.

Having great experience of women he thought to control Lola, but she, being gifted with a superlative temper, laughed in his face. All his cleverness could not make her swerve from the point. "I want a week to myself," she said doggedly. They were talking in French, as Kowlaski could swear more easily in that tongue and wanted freedom of speech.

"But, my dear child—" Kowlaski was always paternal—"it will not do. You are the draw, and if you go out of the bill the people will not come to my house."

"I don't care. I want a week, and a week I will have."

"Why do you wish for this week?"

"That's my business."

Kowlaski tried temper. "If you go, you leave my theater once and for all the time."

"Pschutt!" said Lola, snapping her fingers in his dismayed face. "I draw, and you are in no hurry to get rid of me."

Kowlaski tried reproaches. "If you were a grateful woman—"

"Ah, bah! What of gratitude? You wanted me or would you have seen me die in the gutter."

Kowlaski began to whimper. "You will ruin me, my dear!"

"It would serve you right if I did. You have ruined others in your time. Don't you think I know you? Come—" she rapped on the table—"I want the week. To-morrow and till next Wednesday I'm out of the bill."

"But it cannot be done."

"It must be. I want it to be done."

Kowlaski tried bribing. "I will raise your salary if you stay!"

"Oh, la, la, la, la! I am quite pleased with what I get. If I wished my salary raised I should have it raised. I go for a week."

In the face of this obstinacy Kowlaski gave in. But first of all he tried threats, and Lola threatened to throw a chair at him. He finally agreed that she should have her week, and Lola walked out of the office without thanking him. That was the last he saw of her for seven days.

He made the most of her absence, declaring that she had been called away to nurse a dying mother and would reappear with a broken heart to keep her engagements with the public. Bawdsey saw this notice.

It was the first he had heard of Lola's escapade, and he went at once to her rooms in Bloomsbury to ask where she was going. Lola had already gone, and, according to the landlady, had left no information as to her whereabouts.

"Did she take a box?" asked Bawdsey.

"A small box. She went away in a cab."

"Where did she tell the cabman to drive to?"

"To Oxford Street."

Bawdsey was disappointed. He saw that Lola had taken every precaution to hide her trail, and that there was not much chance of finding her. However, he went to see Kowlaski. The manager began to talk of the dying mother, and Bawdsey shut him up.

"Rubbish! That's for the public. I want to know where she is.

"My dear, I do not know," said Kowlaski, and for the first time in his wicked old life he told the truth.

Not to be beaten, Bawdsey sought out George

Brendon. But George was as ignorant as the manager and the landlady. "I haven't the slightest idea," he said, when Bawdsey asked; "and, to tell you the truth, I don't see why you should try to find out."

"I want to know."

"That is apparent on the face of it. But you are not engaged to marry her, are you, Mr Bawdsey?"

"No such luck," replied the detective, with a dismal face.

"Then I don't see what right you have to control her movements."

"Did she write and tell you where she was going?"

"No, and if she had done so I should not tell you," replied George, annoyed by the man's persistence.

"You may as well be civil to me, Mr Brendon; you know that I am your friend."

"Oh, I've heard all that before! But people who talk much of friendship and gratitude are generally humbugs."

"I am not," said Bawdsey, quietly. "See here, Mr Brendon, Lola is in love with you——"

"That's my business. Leave it alone."

Bawdsey took up his hat. "Oh, very well! If you will not be civil I cannot help you to learn who killed your father."

"What!" George sprang from the table at which he was writing and seized the man's arm. "Do you know that?"

"Gently, Mr Brendon. No, I do not know, but——"

"Then what do you mean by saying——"

"We had better have a chat," said Bawdsey, and sat down. "But I wish to know where I stand. Lola loves you. Do you love her?"

"No," said Brendon, seeing that he would have to humor the man. "I am engaged to marry Miss Ward."

"Will you help me to marry Lola?"

"Willingly—though, to tell you the truth, I know very little about you, and to make that girl marry you—"

"Oh, Lola can look after herself, Mr Brendon. If she becomes my wife she will have the upper hand. But I am so deeply in love with her that I am willing to play second fiddle. Can't you dispossess her of this infatuation for you?"

George shook his head and groaned. "No. She won't listen to reason."

"Well," drawled Bawdsey, recurring to his American accent, "I don't blame her for that. She is in love, and love listens to no one and no thing. I wouldn't listen to reason, either, if it entailed giving up Lola."

"See here, Bawdsey, if you can persuade this woman to get over her liking for me, and to marry you, I shall be delighted. I do not know where she is just now, but it is my impression that she has gone away because she is afraid of me."

"Afraid of you? Oh, that's absurd!"

"No, it isn't. The other morning she saw Miss Ward, and there was a scene in the Park."

Bawdsey hung his red head. "I fear that is my fault," he confessed. "I pointed out Miss Ward to Lola, and—"

"And it was I who foolishly mentioned that Miss Ward sometimes took a walk in the morning—in the Park."

"Oh," said Bawdsey, "I mentioned that also."

"Did you wish Lola to see Miss Ward?" asked George, angrily.

"No. Nor did I intend to say anything about the walking in the early morning. I simply pointed her out in the box to Lola, so that Lola might see there was no chance of your marrying her."

"As if any woman would accept such an excuse," said Brendon, contemptuously. "Then she questioned you about the walk?"

"Yes. She mentioned something about what you had told her, and I was rather free with my tongue. I am not usually," said Bawdsey, penitently, "but there's something about Lola that makes me behave like a child. I'm wax in her hands. So she saw Miss Ward?"

"Yes. And she knows that I am angry. Of course Miss Ward sent to tell me at once, and I called on Lola to give her a talking to, but she was gone when I arrived."

"Would you have spoken harshly to her?"

"Certainly. She had no right to trouble Miss Ward. But now you know why I think she has left town. In a week she will come back thinking my anger is at an end."

"And will it be?" asked Bawdsey, doubtfully.

"It is at an end now. I am quite content not to see Lola again so long as she leaves Miss Ward alone."

"I will try and keep her away," said the detective, "but I have very little influence with her."

"Tell her I am angry and will be still more angry if she does not keep away from Curzon Street. Well, we have discussed this matter. I now want to hear what you meant by your reference to my father. Do you know who killed him?"

Bawdsey shook his head. "I can't say for certain, but I can tell you who might know."

"Who is that?"

"Mr Roger Ireland."

George looked astonished. "But that is ridiculous," he said. "Mr Ireland told me that he did not know."

"Oh, I don't say that he knows for certain. But

he is better acquainted with the matter than you think."

"How did you come to know Mr Ireland?"

"He called to see Miss Bull, and I dropped across him."

"How did you get talking of the case?"

"Well, you see," said Bawdsey, easily, "we naturally talked of Mrs Jersey, and one thing led to another until I discovered that Ireland had been in San Remo when your father was murdered. I wished to find out who killed him, so I questioned Mr Ireland."

"Why do you wish to know who killed my father?" asked George.

"Because I think that the murder of Mrs Jersey is connected with that crime. See here—" Bawdsey cleared his throat—"Mrs Jersey was in San Remo at the time of the death—"

"How do you know that?"

"Don't I tell you I questioned Mr Ireland?"

George looked sharply at the detective. "What magic did you use to make him talk? Mr Ireland knows how to hold his tongue."

"Well, when he found that I was looking after the case of Mrs Jersey (and I made no secret of that) he was good enough to tell me all he knew. He thought, as I did, that the murder in San Remo was connected with the crime of Amelia Square."

"Oh!" George wasn't at all satisfied, as he could not conceive how Bawdsey had induced Ireland to talk. However, he thought it wise to say no more, as he did not wish to make Bawdsey angry and thus run a chance of losing his explanation. "Go on."

"There is nothing more to say," said Bawdsey, rising. "Mr Ireland declined to tell me who he thought was guilty, but he hinted that he had seen the lady in the blue domino unmasked."

"Did he recognize her?"

"I think he did, but he assured me that he could not be sure, and that he had not seen the lady again."

"Then he did know the face?"

Bawdsey's face assumed an impenetrable expression. "I can only refer you to Mr Ireland," he said; "and as to Lola——"

"Oh, she'll turn up again," said Brendon, irritably. "Don't worry me about Lola. I wish you would marry her and take her back to your native land."

"What land am I native of, Mr Brendon?" asked Bawdsey, calmly.

"America, I understand. You hinted as much when we met."

Bawdsey shook his head. "I am as English as you are," he declared.

"Well," said Brendon, with a shrug, "I thought as much. Your accent fails at times. You are not a good actor, Bawdsey."

"I may be a better actor than you think, Mr Brendon."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Never you mind, sir. I can hold my tongue when it suits me, and on this occasion it does suit me. But remember, Mr Brendon, that whatever happens you have a friend in me."

"What is going to happen?"

Bawdsey shook his head solemnly. "One never knows. We are not out of the wood yet, Mr Brendon."

"Are you referring to my father's murder?"

"And to Mrs Jersey's. I have my suspicions, and—well, there's nothing more to be said. When I am *certain* I shall let you know."

"You have your suspicions, then?"

"Yes. But I shall not impart them to any one—not even to you."

"One moment, Bawdsey," said Brendon, as the man had his hand on the door. "Do you suspect Miss Bull?"

"Why should I suspect her?" asked the detective, in surprise.

"Because she was not on good terms with Mrs Jersey, and you have taken up your abode in the house——"

"To watch her, you would say. Well, maybe," rejoined the man, composedly. "I know what I know, and when I am more certain of what I know, sir——" He nodded. "Good-day," he said, and went abruptly.

It struck George that Bawdsey was a most mysterious person and knew far more about the San Remo murder than Derrington could have told him. Still, it was possible that Derrington had unbosomed himself to Bawdsey, and it was necessary to do so if he wanted the murder of Mrs Jersey cleared up. And Derrington, from his refusal to admit that he was at the house on the night and about the time the crime was committed, seemed to know something that might lead to the detection of the assassin.

"Humph," said George to himself when alone, "I have a great mind to go round and see that old man. It seems to me that Bawdsey is trying to serve two masters. It is impossible that my grandfather can know the truth. Yet, going by his height and figure, and that sable claret-colored coat, he was certainly in the house on the night in question. But it's none of my business."

He sat down again to his work and tried to interest himself in the chapter he was writing. But it was all in vain. Bawdsey's speech and Bawdsey's manner, and a conviction that the man was play-



ing his grandfather false, kept recurring to his mind. After an hour's futile work he threw down the pen in despair and went out to call on Derrington.

On arriving at St Giles Square he saw a carriage at the door of the mansion. On asking for Lord Derrington, George was informed that his lordship was engaged with Mrs Ward and could see no one. Brendon turned away, wondering that he had not recognized the carriage, and he was still more vexed with himself when Dorothy put her head out of the brougham and called to him.

"My dearest," he said softly, so that the coachman and footman might not hear, "this is an unexpected pleasure. Why are you not inside?"

"My mother wished to see Lord Derrington alone," replied Dorothy. "I am waiting till she comes out. She has been with him for half an hour. I don't know what they are talking about."

It was at this moment that a message was brought out of the house from Mrs Ward saying that her daughter could drive home as she would not be disengaged for another hour. Dorothy looked puzzled. "I can't understand," she said; "there is something wrong with my mother. Lord Derrington came to see her one day and she has been upset ever since."

George shook his head. He suspected Mrs Ward of knowing more than she chose to confess, and based his suspicions on the fact of the yellow holly which she had given to Dorothy to present to him. She had made her daughter a cat's-paw, but why she should wish to startle Mrs Jersey with a reminder of the San Remo murder was a thing George could not understand. Meanwhile, he kept these suspicions to himself and made some excuse. "Oh, *Mrs Ward and my grandfather are probably talking over my iniquities,*" he said easily. "But I don't

see why I should not take advantage of this chance."

"What do you mean, George?" asked Dorothy with a becoming blush.

"Well, here is the brougham, and here you are. Why shouldn't we drive around the Park before you go home?"

"My mother will be angry," said Dorothy, hesitating. Then she blushed again. "But I shall brave her anger. We have much to talk about, as I wish to speak of Lola Velez."

"Dorothy, you surely do not think——"

"No, no! But I want to ask you a few questions. I believe she is mad, George. Get in and we will drive round the Park."

The order was given, George seated himself beside his divinity, and they drove away for a pleasant hour. "You see Fate plays into our hands," said George, taking those of Dorothy in his own. And then the conversation became quite private and very, very confidential.

Meantime, Mrs Ward was seated in a chair facing Lord Derrington. The old gentleman looked savage, but Mrs Ward was quite at her ease. They had been having a war of words, and Mrs Ward so far had come off best. The conversation had been in reference to the sentence whispered in the little woman's ear when he had made her promise to hold her tongue about George.

"Of course I do think it is the meanest thing a man can do," said Mrs Ward, bitterly. "What if I did cheat at cards? Every woman does that, and I was losing no end of money."

"I don't think your friends would take that view," said Derrington, grimly. "I came to hear of the matter quite by chance, and it is plain that you won over a hundred pounds by cheating."

"It's that horrid Mrs Wayflete who told you——"

"No. If Mrs Wayflete knows, she has held her tongue. I learned it from a source of which you are ignorant. But the fact remains, you cheated, and if your friends knew it you would be ostracized by all of them."

"As if they did not do these things themselves," retorted Mrs Ward; "but since you have been so nasty, I intend to be nasty, too."

"I shouldn't advise you to be nasty to me, Mrs Ward. I have a large reserve fund of strength."

"You'll need it all to hold your own against me."

Lord Derrington nodded. "I quite admit that you are a dangerous woman," he said quietly. "Well, and in what way have you made up your mind to be nasty?"

Mrs Ward laughed. "You needn't repeat my adjectives," she said in her most frivolous manner. "If you want to know the way in which I intend to protect myself——"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean this," cried the little woman, growing angry all at once. "I am not going to be threatened about that unfortunate episode connected with the cards—it was that horrid Mrs Wayflete who told you, so don't deny it—I am not going to be threatened without holding my own. Besides, I want Dorothy to marry your grandson."

"Which one?" asked Derrington, coolly.

"You have only Walter Vane."

"Excuse me, George Brendon, whether there is a marriage or not, is equally my grandson."

"I believe you admire him."

"Very much, and it is in my mind to acknowledge him as my heir."

"I thought as much after your sticking up for him the other day," said Mrs Ward, furiously.

"Now, look here, Lord Derrington. If Dorothy marries that Brendon creature I won't be able to do a thing with her—you know quite well I won't."

"That means you won't be able to handle my money through George after I am dead," said Derrington, grimly.

"You can put it that way if you like. But Walter shall be Dorothy's husband, I have made up my mind."

"Because he's a fool and putty in your hands."

"I shouldn't be vulgar if I were you," said Mrs Ward, in a dignified manner, and quite forgetting that she had once used the same illustration herself in connection with Brendon. "But so long as George leaves Dorothy alone I shall say nothing."

"That's really very good of you, Mrs Ward."

"Your being nasty won't make me change my mind. But you quite understand the situation, Lord Derrington. Walter is to marry my daughter, and George is to be kept away."

"I don't see how he is to be kept away. I assure you Brendon is a strong man, and his will is quite equal to mine."

"Nonsense, you have the strongest will in London."

"And you come here to try and break it."

"Life is a game," said Mrs Ward, leaning back, with a pretty air of philosophy. "And at present I hold the trump card."

"What is it?" asked Derrington, wondering by what means she hoped to make him consent to her demands.

"I'll tell you presently," said Mrs Ward, in a most masterful tone, which amused Derrington. "But you understand that if George Brendon doesn't keep away I shall give information to the police and have him arrested in connection with that murder."

"Oh, no, you won't," said Derrington, good-humoredly.

"Oh, yes, I shall. As to your accusation about my having cheated, you shall say nothing about that."

"Indeed, I shall do so if you trouble Brendon."

"Think of Dorothy."

"I do think of Dorothy, and I'm very sorry she has such a mother."

"You dare to insult me," began Mrs Ward, when Derrington, who was losing patience, cut her short.

"I've had enough of this," he said sharply. "You shall hold your tongue about Brendon or I'll tell what I know."

"Then I'll do the same."

Derrington bowed politely. "By all means," he said. "My reputation is already so bad that a word or two from you can scarcely make it worse."

"Oh, it's more than that," said Mrs Ward, quietly, and she spoke in so positive a manner that Derrington began to recollect his worst sins. "Do you remember the night you came home here at one o'clock and found me in this very room?"

"Yes. You came with the amiable intention of telling me that George Brendon was going to pass the night at Mrs Jersey's, and that you suspected that he was up to mischief."

"I took the trouble to come from a party for that very purpose," was Mrs Ward's plaintive reply, "and how was I received?"

"I told you to mind your own business, if I remember."

"And you swore at me," said the little woman; "as if a man who calls himself a gentleman——"

"Mrs Ward, I am getting tired of this *circumlocution*. What is it you have to say?"

"Well, on that night you were in a fur coat."

"My usual coat in winter."

"It was the night when Mrs Jersey was killed."

"Was it, indeed? I never noticed the coincidence."

"No. But you knew about it," said Mrs Ward; "you threw your coat on yonder sofa. I seated myself near it by chance. There was something hard in the pocket of the coat. When you were out of the room I took the something out. There it is," and she laid an Italian stiletto on the table.

"What is that?" asked Derrington, calmly, but with an anxious face.

"That," said Mrs Ward, touching it daintily with her finger, "is the weapon with which Mrs Jersey was stabbed."

## CHAPTER XV

### A RECOGNITION

**I**F Mrs Ward expected to startle Derrington into a confession she was never more mistaken in her calculations. Lord Derrington had not moved in diplomatic circles all his life without knowing how to guard against the display of emotion. With an utterly expressionless face he looked at the stiletto. It was a slender steel blade with a silver handle of Renaissance workmanship, evidently a valuable and curious relic of the Middle Ages. It might have been made by Cellini himself and have been worn by Cesare Borgia. But Derrington stared at it as though he knew nothing about it.

"Well," said Mrs Ward, sharply, and rather disappointed he did not grovel on the instant, "what do you say?"

Derrington looked at her in rather a humorous manner. "What do you want me to say?" he asked. "Confess that I killed Mrs Jersey and then brought this weapon carefully home in my pocket for you to discover and use against me?"

"That is a subterfuge," said Mrs Ward. "You did not expect to find me waiting for you, and you never meant that dagger to be discovered, Lord Derrington."

"I certainly never did," he assented heartily. "I cannot imagine how you came to know more than I did."

"*What do you mean?*" asked the little woman, *sharply.*

"Well, you see," said Lord Derrington, quietly, "this is a very clever bit of business on your part, but so far as I am concerned it has nothing to do with me. I never saw that weapon before."

"Oh, that's rubbish!" said Mrs Ward with a mirthless laugh. "I found it in the pocket of your fur coat on the very——"

"You say you found it there," said Derrington, meaningly.

"Do you deny that it was in the pocket?"

"Certainly. Had it been in the pocket I should have known it was there. But it was not in the pocket."

Mrs Ward stared. "You are very brazen," she said; "you knew it was there all the time."

"In the pocket?" asked Derrington, politely and perfectly calm.

Mrs Ward hesitated. Then she faced him defiantly. "I am so sure of my ground," she declared, "that I don't mind saying it wasn't exactly in the pocket. There was a hole in the pocket and the dagger had slipped down into the lining between the inside fur and the outer cloth. It lay sideways, and what with its position and the heavy fur——"

"I could not have known it was there," finished Derrington, balancing a paper-cutter on his forefinger. "You have found a mare's nest, my dear Mrs Ward, and if this is your trump card I am sorry to say it won't take the trick you wish to secure. I did not know that this——" he touched the stiletto—"was in the lining of my fur coat."

"Then it was, and Mrs Jersey was stabbed with it."

"Isn't that taking a great deal for granted?" said Derrington, with raised brows. "Mrs Jersey, according to the doctor, if I recall the report of the inquest rightly, was certainly stabbed with a weapon



similar to this. But why do you say this is the one?"

"Because I believe you were in the house on that night."

"Which house? Be explicit, please."

Mrs Ward was growing angry at this calm defiance. "In the house in Amelia Square. You went there to prevent that Brendon creature from making Mrs Jersey confess."

Lord Derrington laughed. "You would not make a good lawyer," said he. "By your own showing I did not know that Brendon was to be at Mrs Jersey's on that night."

"I certainly came to tell you," said Mrs Ward, feeling that she had missed a point, "but you could easily have heard it elsewhere."

"Who from? Brendon did not advertise in the papers that he was stopping with Mrs Jersey on the night in question."

"Then Mr Train——"

"I met Mr Train for the first time at your house the other night."

"Dorothy told you," said Mrs Ward, determined not to surrender any advantage she might have gained.

"You can ask your daughter and she will tell you that I had not seen her all that week. Is there any one else, Mrs Ward?"

The little woman rose to her feet with an artificial laugh and shook out perfume from her silken skirts. "You are very clever and obstinate, Lord Derrington, but how will you explain this——" she pointed to the stiletto—"to the authorities?"

"There will be no need for me to do that," said Derrington, and took up the weapon. Mrs Ward stretched out her hand.

"*My property, if you please, Lord Derrington.*"

The old gentleman opened a drawer, dropped the weapon into it, and closed the drawer with a snap. "It's locked now," he said coolly. "I shall take charge of this."

"How dare you? I insist——"

"Oh, dear, no! You insist on nothing." Lord Derrington rose, looking like a giant as he towered over the little woman. "My dear Mrs Ward," said he, quietly, but in his deepest tones, "I have been very patient with you, but this thing must end. You must promise to hold your tongue about Brendon and——"

"And about you, I suppose," she sneered.

"About me?" Derrington's tone expressed surprise. "What have you to hold your tongue about as regards me?"

Mrs Ward stamped, though as a rule she was not given to betraying violent emotion. "Oh, it's too ridiculous!" she said furiously. "I can say to the police how I found the stiletto in your coat, I suppose."

"I should advise you not to talk to any one about a thing which exists only in your imagination."

"The stiletto——"

"What are you talking of, Mrs Ward?"

"It's in that drawer." She pointed to the table.

"Oh, dear, no, it isn't," said Derrington, blandly; "there is no stiletto, there never was one. We have had a nice talk—shall we say about chiffons?" In spite of her rage at being outwitted Mrs Ward gave a hollow laugh at the thought of Lord Derrington discussing chiffons. "A nice talk, I say, and now we must part."

"Not before I have had my say," said Mrs Ward, savagely. "I see perfectly well that I have been foolish to let that stiletto get into your hands. But I thought I was dealing with a man of honor."

"Ah, Mrs Ward, few of us can aspire to your high principles!"

The sneer infuriated her. "You can deny the stiletto if you like to the public, but you dare not do so to me."

"Why not? For the sake of argument we will admit the existence of the weapon. You come here with it in your hand and state that you found it in my coat—in the lining of the coat."

"And I did—I did—you know I did."

"Indeed, I know nothing of the sort. I deny that the stiletto was ever in pocket or in lining. I did not see you take it out."

"I waited till you were out of the room before I examined the coat."

"Of course, but by doing so you have defeated your own object. Had you produced the weapon from the coat and showed it to me at the very moment, your accusation might have held water. As it is, the thing is simply ridiculous. You come here, you accuse me of a crime—"

"I did not accuse you," said Mrs Ward, beginning to find that Derrington was too much even for her. "I believe Brendon killed the woman—oh, yes! You went to the house and you saw him. He and Mrs Jersey had words, as she would not confess, and Brendon killed her with the stiletto. Then you came in, and to save him you put the dagger into your pocket, sent him up to bed, and promised to hold your tongue, and—"

Derrington laughed. "You have a most vivid imagination, Mrs Ward," he said, with a shrug; "but, as it happens, you are talking nonsense. I was not at Amelia Square that evening, but at my club, as any member then present can assure you. I can prove what is called an alibi, Mrs Ward, *which means that I can account for every moment*

of my time, from the minute I left this house to the minute I returned to find you here. As to the stiletto you say you took out of my pocket, that is rubbish. On the whole, I think you had better hold your tongue."

"If I go to the police they will open that drawer."

"Oh, no! An Englishman's house is his castle, you know, and a man in my position cannot be treated in the way you suggest with impunity. Moreover, Mrs Ward, there is ample time to destroy the stiletto."

"Which you will do," she said, recovering her composure, now that she found it was useless to protest.

"No. I wouldn't even mind showing it to the police and saying how you brought it here with an accusation. If the police can prove that this is the weapon with which Mrs Jersey was stabbed, and if you and the police can prove that the stiletto was in my pocket on the night of the murder, then you and the police—" Derrington made an ironical bow—"are extremely clever."

"Oh, very well," said Mrs Ward, realizing her defeat, "I shall say nothing about you. But Brendon—"

"You will hold your tongue about him also. I quite understand how you proposed to hold this stiletto, and the tale of its being discovered in my pocket, over me. If I did not consent to the marriage of Miss Ward and Walter—eh?"

"I must do the best for my child."

"Even going so far as threats. Well, I have too high a respect for Miss Ward to ask her to marry such a worm as Walter. She would do better to take Brendon."

"She shan't marry him."

"Why do you hate the man so?" asked Derrington, looking into her eyes. "I know he is a strong

man, and for the money's sake you do not want him to be your son-in-law. But even this does not account for your hatred. Why do you hate him?"

"I have nothing to say," retorted Mrs Ward, who had flushed and paled alternately during this speech. "Please see me to the door."

Derrington walked to the door and opened it with a bow. "Willingly. I think we understand one another."

"I think we do," said Mrs Ward, with an artificial laugh. "You do credit to your reputation, Lord Derrington."

"Praise from Mrs Ward is praise, indeed," said the ironical old gentleman as he descended the stairs side by side with the woman who could have found it in her heart to kill him. "I am sorry to ask you to leave me so soon, as our conversation was most enjoyable. But I have to see a certain Mr Ireland——"

"Is that Brendon's guardian?" asked Mrs Ward, coming to a sudden stop in the hall.

"His former guardian," corrected Derrington. "How do you come to know of him, Mrs Ward?"

"I think Dorothy mentioned the name," she said in rather a faltering tone. "Dear me, how my face burns! I wish I had a veil."

"I am sorry, Mrs Ward, but the late Lady Derrington's veils are not modern enough for you."

"What nonsense!" said Mrs Ward, who appeared flurried. "Please tell your man to call a cab. I sent away the carriage."

"Let me send you home in mine."

"No! No, I want to go at once," and she approached the door quickly. "When did you say Mr Ireland was coming?"

Derrington glanced at his watch. "He is due now," he said, and looked at her, wondering why *she asked the question.*

Mrs Ward's face was turned away. She was dressed in furs and carried a muff. When the door was opened by the footman a gentleman appeared on the threshold. Mrs Ward lifted her muff to her face, but not before the stranger had caught sight of her face and had uttered an ejaculation of surprise. "You!" he said, stepping forward.

"What do you mean?" said Mrs Ward, with her face still hidden. "Lord Derrington, this friend of yours is making a mistake. Tell that man to be quick calling a cab." And she moved past the stranger.

"Pardon," he said politely, "but I wish to speak with you."

Derrington bent his bushy brows. "Let the lady pass," he said; "who are you, sir, to stop the egress of my guests?"

"My name is Rodger Ireland," said the stranger, quietly, "and I have been looking for that lady for over thirty years."

"What does the man mean?" asked Mrs Ward, haughtily, but looking disturbed.

"Lord Derrington," said Ireland, "I think if you will permit this lady and me to have a talk——"

"There seems to be some mistake," said Derrington. "Mrs Ward, will you not wait until we rectify it?"

"No. The man is mad. Let me pass, sir. There is the cab."

She would have stepped out but Ireland again placed his bulky form in her way. It was all done so tactfully that the footman on the pavement did not notice anything unusual. The man was waiting by the cab to assist Mrs Ward in. But Ireland would not let her pass.

"Lord Derrington," he said softly, lest the footman should overhear, "this is the lady who was with your son when he was murdered."

Derrington was not easily startled, but he turned suddenly white. Mrs Ward shrank back into the hall. Now that the truth was told she seemed to recover from her fears and to regain all her tact. "I shall not want the cab at present," she said to the footman. "Tell the man to wait. Lord Derrington, if you do not wish these private affairs to be discussed in the presence of the servants we had better return to the library."

Lord Derrington could only stare, being confounded at her coolness. He was much moved by the unexpected mention of his dead son, and without a word went up the stairs again, while Mrs Ward followed, and Ireland came at her heels. She looked as though she were a prisoner between two guards.

When they found themselves in the library Derrington closed the door and went to his seat. He looked much older, having aged in a most extraordinary manner under the shock of Ireland's information. Mrs Ward was perfectly cool, and resumed her former seat. As to Ireland, he let himself carefully down into the most capacious armchair he could find. Mrs Ward opened the conversation at once.

"You say you saw me at San Remo?" she asked.

"I did," replied Ireland, in his heavy voice. "I was there at the time Mr Percy Vane was murdered—" Derrington groaned—"and I was at the masked ball where—"

"The Veglioni," said Mrs Ward. "Well, you were there. You say you saw me?"

"In a blue domino."

"There were plenty of blue dominoes at that ball—at least I should think there were."

"Yes, but you wore a sprig of yellow holly. That *was why I recognized you when you were masked.*"

"How did you know it was I?"

"Because early in the evening you went into a box. I was there talking to the Marchesa Beltrami, to whom the box belonged. You removed your mask and I had ample opportunity to observe you."

"What reason had you to observe me?" asked Mrs Ward, just as though she were counsel examining a witness.

"Well," said Ireland, smoothing his face, "you see I knew Mr Vane very well. He married a woman of whom I was fond." Derrington shifted restlessly in his chair. "Do not be afraid, Lord Derrington, I do not intend to talk of Rosina Lockwood—"

"You are talking to me at present," said Mrs Ward, sharply. "You can talk to Lord Derrington later."

"I rather think, ma'am," said Ireland, "that Lord Derrington will want to talk to you."

"At present I say nothing," was his lordship's reply, and he watched the two faces before him with close attention.

"You saw me unmask in a certain box," said Mrs Ward, quickly. "Do you mean to say that after all these years—over thirty years—that you recognize me again? I was a girl then; I am a—a—" She was about to say old woman, as being more emphatic with the adjective, but her vanity made her swallow the word. "I am a woman now."

"Quite so. But you have a mole on your forehead just above the left eyebrow. I knew you by that; and then I have a splendid memory for faces, and yours—" Ireland bowed gallantly—"is too beautiful to forget easily."

Mrs Ward shrugged her shoulders. She did not want compliments, but she wished very much to get out of the trouble in which she found herself in-



volved. "It's a most remarkable memory," she said.

"It is, madam," assented Ireland; "my memory was always considered remarkable. And the fact is that I was thinking of the murder almost at the moment I entered the hall. Consequently your face was in my mind's eye. That made the chance of recognizing you more sure. Had I not been thinking of old days I might not have guessed so readily who you were."

"Why were you thinking of the murder, then?" asked Derrington.

"Well, my lord, you sent for me to speak with me about George—" Mrs Ward gave a short laugh, and Derrington smiled—"so I was naturally thinking of George; such a thought led to my thinking of his parents, and finally I remembered the circumstance of your son's death, as I thought you might wish to talk of it, and therefore desired to get my memory in order. In this way did I recognize the lady."

"This is all very well," said Mrs Ward. "You say you recognize me, Mr Ireland. Is that your name?"

"It is, but your memory is not so good as mine. We met only once." Derrington was not so sure if Mrs Ward's memory was not good, for he remembered how she had tried to get away before the arrival of Ireland. "Go on! Go on!" he said irritably. "I wish to know the worst."

"The worst is that I am supposed to have killed Percy Vane," said Mrs Ward, coolly. "So you accuse me of that?" she asked Ireland.

"By no means. But you were at that ball—"

"I was. In a blue domino with a sprig of holly at my breast."

"And you were with Mr Vane?"

"No, I was not!"

"You went out with Mr Vane."

"I did not. It was my sister."

"Your sister!" said Derrington. "Hah!" and he relapsed into silence. Mrs Ward shot a suspicious look at him, but his inscrutable face betrayed nothing.

"I remember," said Ireland, in a slow, prosy way, "that there were two Miss Howards at San Remo—at the Hotel d'Angleterre. They were with their father, General Howard. I never met them, but Mr Vane went frequently to call at the house."

"He did," said Mrs Ward, "if by house you mean the hotel. The fact is, my sister Jenny was in love with Captain Vane——"

"I heard it was you," said Ireland, distrustfully.

"It was my sister," said Mrs Ward, coldly. "We thought Mr Vane would marry her, but he certainly showed no signs of proposing. I suppose he was too fond of his dead wife," and she shot a sneering look at Lord Derrington, who winced.

"Don't say a word against Rosina Lockwood," said Ireland, quickly.

"You see what he calls her," said Mrs Ward to Derrington. "There was no marriage."

"Ma'am!" cried Ireland, rising.

"Oh, never mind," replied Mrs Ward, waving her hand. "There is no need for you to lose your temper, my good man. I am not going to speak of the woman——"

"She was an angel."

"And a woman—that's the generic name for the sex. However, it was my sister Jenny who loved Percy Vane. She would go to the ball, and persuaded me to go with her. We slipped out of the hotel and went without a chaperon. Our father would have been shocked had he known, but it was merely the escapade of two schoolgirls. I went with a friend, and Jenny looked about for Mr Vane. We

agreed to meet after an hour and go home. As there were other blue dominoes at the ball we each wore—" and Mrs Ward repeated the word to emphasize the fact—" *each* a sprig of yellow holly. I went to a box to have supper with a certain cousin of mine, and my sister then departed with Mr Vane."

"Why did she leave the ballroom?" asked Derrington.

"Because Mr. Vane was shocked. He recognized her voice and made her unmask. He insisted on taking her home first, and then intended to return for me, as he could not find me at the moment. They went out together, Mr Ireland, and that is the last I saw of Mr. Vane."

"What was the last your sister saw of him?"

"She was at the hotel and in our bedroom when I returned, which I did after looking vainly for her. She said that Mr Vane had escorted her to the hotel and had left her at the gate at her earnest request, as Jenny was so afraid lest my father should hear of our escapade. She said good-night to Mr Vane and then went to her room. When we heard of the murder next morning she became very ill and my father took her away. But she always declared to me that she did not know who murdered Percy Vane."

"Did your father ever know that she was in Vane's company on that night?" asked Ireland.

"Never! We kept our folly a profound secret from him."

"Did any one else know?"

"You did," said Mrs Ward sharply; "and Mr Vane did, and a servant at the hotel—an English servant who attended to us. In fact, it was she who procured the yellow holly by which Jenny and I were to identify one another."

"What was her name?" asked Derrington, quickly,

and raising himself in his chair with eagerness to hear the answer.

"Eliza Stokes."

"Ah! I thought so. Mrs Jersey?"

"Yes, Mrs Jersey. And now, Lord Derrington, you know how I come to take such an interest in the death of that woman."

"Yes. But I cannot understand how you came to know that Mrs Jersey was Eliza Stokes."

"That's my business," flashed out Mrs Ward.

"Or why," pursued Derrington, unmoved, "why you sent her the yellow holly?"

"Because I was not quite positive if she really was Eliza Stokes. I thought that the yellow holly, being connected in her mind with the death of Mr Vane, would make her betray herself."

"It did in a way—but to Brendon. He would not have told you."

"He would doubtless have told Dorothy, and she would have told me."

Ireland, in his thoughtful, ponderous way, turned this matter over in his own mind. "Where is your sister now?" he asked.

Mrs Ward replied with some reserve. "I can't tell you that. She went out of her mind for a time after the murder of Mr Vane, and after she came out of the asylum we were all afraid to live with her. My father put her under some one's charge, and when he died she was allowed an annuity. Her guardian died and my sister vanished. We made no attempt to find her, and it was supposed that she had put an end to herself."

Ireland looked at Derrington. "Did you ever meet Miss Jenny Howard, my lord?" he asked.

"No," said Derrington, "but I have known Mrs Ward for many, many years."

"Quite twenty," said Mrs Ward, with an artificial

laugh. "We grow old. No, Mr Ireland, Lord Derrington never met my sister. Why you ask I cannot conceive!"

"Because Lord Derrington is under a wrong impression. He has met your sister, and in this very room."

"I beg your pardon," began Derrington. "I——"

Ireland cut him short. "She called to see you here about the renewal of the Amelia Square lease."

"Miss Bull?" said his lordship. "I thought there was something familiar about her face. So Miss Bull is Mrs Ward's sister?"

"She told me so herself," was Ireland's reply.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE PIPE OF PEACE

**B**RENDON was much astonished a day or two later to receive an invitation to dine with his grandfather. After the somewhat stormy interview he had participated in with the old tyrant, George certainly never expected to be treated well by the man whose path he had crossed. He had heard many tales of Derrington's pride, and of his relentless pursuit of those whom he conceived had done him wrong. As George had fought the old man with his own weapons, and had come off victor, he did not expect to be pardoned.

But in this he was wrong. Derrington, sickened with Walter's milk-and-water ways, saw in Brendon a worthy successor who would be able to hold his own in will and word, and would shed fresh luster on the house. Had George been polite, and what the old lord sneeringly called cringing, he would never have received the invitation. As it was, Derrington took him to his hard old heart. He chuckled to think of Walter's dismay when he heard that he had an elder cousin and would not be likely to inherit the title or the money.

However astonished, Brendon was too much a man-of-the-world to reveal his feelings. On the evening in question he presented himself at the mansion in St Giles Square, scrupulously groomed and brushed. Derrington looked approvingly on his dress, which set off a handsome figure to advantage.

the satisfaction he felt. With a surly grunt he took and he unbent so far as to advance to George with outstretched hand.

"We had rather a rough interview, George," he said, "so I have invited you to smoke the pipe of peace."

Brendon shook the old man's hand quietly, but without much enthusiasm. He could not conjecture what Derrington meant by behaving in a way so different to that he usually adopted. His host felt the slack hand-clasp, and winced on seeing the want of response in Brendon's face. Queerly enough Derrington, contrary to accepted opinion, had a heart, and was so much taken with George that he wished to draw him to himself. Still, he could not but admit that seeing how he had treated the young fellow in the past it was not to be expected that Brendon would act the part of an affectionate relative immediately. Derrington rather admired George for his uncompromising attitude.

"Dinner will be ready soon," said the old lord, waving Brendon to a seat; "only our two selves. I wish to consult you."

"Consult me?" George could not keep the astonishment out of his face.

"It's rather late in the day, is it not?" remarked Derrington, dryly, "but you see I am old, George, and have not much time to spare. Yes, I wish you to consult with me after dinner about—but that can come in the course of our conversation. Meantime, let us talk of anything you like."

"The weather, sir?"

"No, confound you," snapped Derrington, with a flash of his old irritable self; "talk of wine, wit, and women if you like, but spare me platitudes."

Brendon stared at his shoes and smiled under his *mustache*. "I do not think I can say anything

Also the haughty bearing of Brendon pleased him, very original about the subjects you mention," he said quietly.

"Talk of Miss Ward, then. You can be original on that point."

Brendon would rather not have mentioned Dorothy, but he was quite determined to show his grandfather that he fully intended to marry his lady-love, and that he was not afraid to speak his mind. "I do not fancy that there is anything particularly original in a love-story. I met Miss Ward some three years before, I have loved her ever since, and we will marry when——"

"There, there," interrupted Derrington, waving his hand, "let us not get on to that subject as yet. We can talk of it after dinner. In fact, you may as well know that I asked you here to discuss your position. We must have an understanding."

"I think you must intend it to be a pleasant one," said Brendon, "as you have asked me to dinner."

"And to smoke the pipe of peace. There's the gong. Heigh-ho!"—he rose rather sluggishly—"gout is stiffening my limbs."

It struck Brendon that his grandfather looked old and very haggard. He had lost his fresh color, his eyes were sunken, and the defiant curl was out of his enormous mustache. He moved slowly toward the door, and George felt sorry to see him so lonely. He knew that Derrington hated all his relatives, and that his relatives cordially hated him, so there was none to comfort the old man in his declining years. Walter Vane was less than nothing, as his mere presence served to irritate his grandfather.

Moved by a sudden impulse, George made no remark, but moved to the elder man's side and offered his arm. The footman was holding the door open, and Derrington could not express, even by a look,



Brendon's arm, but George guessed by the warm pressure that Derrington was pleased. That simple, kindly movement served to draw the two men closer together, and they sat down to an excellent dinner in good spirits.

It was quite a banquet, for Derrington lived in a most expensive manner, and in spite of a sadly diminished income he would never abate the splendor of the style in which he had lived all his life. The table was a round one, laid with exquisite taste, and was placed under a kind of velvet tent, which shut off the rest of the room and made the meal particularly cosy. George, who had a taste for art, admired the finish of the silver, the beauty of the Crown Derby service, the glitter of the cut glass, which was unusually massive, and the adornments of the table. It was a perfect little banquet, and after the somewhat stale food of his lodgings, George enjoyed the meal greatly. Derrington himself did not eat much, but he took great pleasure in seeing George enjoy his viands.

"I had a fine appetite myself once," he observed; "you have inherited it from me. Never be ashamed to eat, George—it means good work. The man who starves himself, starves his public."

"You mean in the quality of his work, sir?"

"Of course. Poor living means poor thoughts."

"Well," said Brendon, with a smile, "I don't think rich living means rich thoughts."

"Certainly not. Whoever said it did? Remember the saying of the Greeks, and, egad, they were the only people who ever knew how to live."

"What saying is that?" asked George.

"Moderation is the corner-stone of dissipation."

"Ah, that's good, sir. But were the Greeks ever *dissipated*?"

"No, because they followed the advice of that

epigram. George, if you expect me to explain epigrams I shall lose my respect for you."

"Have you any, sir?"

"You wouldn't be here if I had not," said Derrington, pulling his huge mustache. "There's your Cousin Walter——"

"My cousin, sir?"

"Of course. You know that." George thought it wiser to say nothing, although it was strange that Derrington should mention the relationship himself. The old man gave him a quick glance and continued: "As I say, there is your Cousin Walter. I wouldn't ask him to dinner on any account. He's a fool, sir."

"He means well."

"If there is one class of people I hate more than another it is that Pharisaic lot who mean well. They make all the mischief."

"With the best intentions," put in Brendon, taking some wine.

"Best intentions are fatal. How many plans have come to naught because of best intentions? Take some of that port."

"No more, thank you, sir."

"I insist. There are walnuts."

"I don't mind the nuts, but the port——" George shook his head.

Derrington, at his own table, was too polite to press the matter, but he scored up another victory to Brendon's strong will. More, he passed off the matter with a laugh. "You have the hereditary gout, I see, George, when you are afraid of a glass of port."

"It's not that, sir, but I drink very little. I work on milk."

"Bah!" Derrington made a wry face. "Then your work——"

"Is all the better for it. Those who drink beer think beer."

"And those who drink milk think cows, I should say."

"Your knowledge on that point prevents contradiction on mine."

Derrington chuckled. This was just the kind of epigrammatic reply he relished. "You must enter the Diplomatic Service, sir," said he, looking approvingly from under his bushy brows.

"Don't you think I'm rather old?"

"Brains are never old, sir. And you have 'em. It's what the Diplomatic Service in this country requires and what it never gets. I was in the Service myself at one time."

"So I have heard," said Brendon, cracking nuts composedly.

"Eh! What did you hear?"

"You must excuse me at your own table, sir."

"Pooh, if you want to say anything disagreeable my own table is the safest place you can say it at. I can't throw things at you."

"Still, a guest must be polite," argued George.

"I like my guests to be truthful."

"Very well, sir, if you will have it—and I feel that it would be bad manners to refuse your request—it is said that you nearly set Europe by the ears when you were ambassador."

Derrington roared. "I did—I did, and I wish I had brought about the war I wanted. It would have done no end of good."

"Does war ever do good?" asked Brendon, doubtfully.

"Certainly. It stirs up things, and teaches men how to use their hands and brains. Without war there is too much wrapping up in cotton-wool. *Don't tell me, George, that you aren't a soldier at*

heart, for nearly all your ancestors fought for their country.

"And fought their country also, I believe."

"When they didn't get their rights," said Derrington, grimly. "I have been a fighter myself all my life, and I've held my own."

"So they say, sir, and I admire you for it."

"Hah! Very good of you, I'm sure," said Derrington, ironically, "but in my old age I can't hold my own, so I have to call in you."

George looked surprised. "Do you intend to do me the honor to ask for my advice, sir?"

"Bless my soul, are you also without understanding, sir? Didn't I say so when you first came?"

"Of course. I forgot."

"You shouldn't forget, though it's useful at times to do so."

"In what cases, sir?"

"Forget a woman's age, forget to talk about yourself, and forget your relations if you can. Come," he added, seeing George laughing, "the wine and food have thawed you. There's coffee in the library, and we can talk over our cigars. Up I get. George, your arm."

He not only asked for it, but took it with marked pleasure. The footman in attendance returned to the servants' hall to state that the Old Devil (the domestic name for Derrington) had quite taken to the new young gentleman. Had the servants known who George was, they would have had a long gossip. As it was, they simply said that the Old Devil was always taking fancies and soon grew tired.

Meanwhile, Brendon was seated in a comfortable chair, enjoying one of the best cigars he had ever placed between his lips. At his elbow smoked a cup of Mocha, and in the chair on the other side of a

roaring fire of sea-timber smiled Lord Derrington. He looked a grim and determined old gentleman as he bent his shaggy brows on his grandson. He was becoming more and more delighted with the young man. "I shall have a prop for my old age at last," he thought. "Damme, he's a fine fellow! Ah, youth! youth!"

George was very comfortable, and also felt grateful for the kindness which his grandfather was showing him. At the same time he felt as though he were acting wrongly in hobnobbing with a man who persistently blackened his mother's memory. But Brendon thought he saw signs of repentance in Derrington, and wished to improve the situation if he could. It was difficult for him to quite forgive the old rascal, but he was sorry for his loneliness and haggard looks. Besides, George was a Christian in more than merely going to church on Sunday.

"I suppose you wondered when you received my invitation," said Derrington, in his hardest tone.

"I did, sir. I wondered very much."

"And you felt inclined to refuse."

"I had almost made up my mind to."

"Why did you change your mind?"

George pondered, and looked again at his neat shoes. "Well, sir," said he, after a pause, "I thought that after a dinner we might come to understand each other better, and I am anxious for peace."

"And for recognition of your birth."

"Naturally. The one included the other."

"Does that mean you will fight till you get what you want?"

"Yes," said George curtly, and then closed his lips with a firm determination to give battle if necessary. At the same time he felt it was rather awkward after eating Derrington's food. A sudden *impulse* made him rise.

"What's the matter now?" asked Derrington, not moving.

"Well, sir," burst out Brendon with a candor unusual in him, "I have a feeling that we are going to quarrel, and in your own house, and after that very excellent dinner I don't want to behave rudely. It will be better to postpone this talk to some other time."

"Not a bit of it," said Derrington, quietly; "we are relatives, and quarrels between relatives do not count. Sit down. I have something important to say to you."

George sat down and prepared for the worst. "We'll leave the question of your birth alone for the present," said the elder in a hard tone. "At this moment I wish to talk of Mrs Jersey's death."

"Yes," said Brendon, looking down.

"Also about your father's death."

"What has that to do with this, sir?"

"I believe the one is connected with the other."

George remembered what Bawdsey had said. "I've heard that remark before," he observed.

"Of course. That detective I employed to watch you made it."

"He did. I think you trust that man too much, sir," said Brendon, after a pause.

"Do you? I thought he was a friend of yours?"

"Oh—" George shrugged his shoulders—"I saved his life, but that does not constitute friendship."

"I would fight a man who saved my life," said Derrington, grimly.

"Well, sir, I don't think Bawdsey is worthy of your confidence."

"I know he isn't. But you see I can't help myself."

George looked up quickly. "Blackmail?"

"Something of that sort. I intend to trust my

own flesh and blood—that is, I intend to tell you all I know connected with the Jersey case, and ask you to help me to get the better of Bawdsey.”

“I shall do my best, sir.”

“Willingly?”

“Assuredly, sir.”

Derrington was rather moved. “I have not behaved well, George.”

“That’s true enough, sir,” said George, who was not going to be weak, “but you can make amends by acknowledging that my mother was an honest woman.”

“I believe she was, George, for none but an honest woman could have borne a son like you. But you see I know no more than you do where the marriage took place.”

“Do you acknowledge that there was a marriage?” said George, starting to his feet. Derrington rose also, and the tall men faced one another. Then the elder placed his hands on the shoulders of the younger, with a look on his face which Brendon had never seen before. And certainly the look was new to Derrington.

“My boy,” said he, “I am sure there was a marriage. I am sure that you are my legitimate heir, and, by Heavens! I intend to acknowledge you as such before the week’s out.”

Brendon was so moved by this sudden recognition of all he longed for that a sudden weakness seized him, and he sat down, covering his face with his hand. Derrington thought the young man did so to conceal his tears, but in reality George was putting up a short thanksgiving for this wonderful and bloodless victory. His grandfather again touched his shoulder. “My boy,” he said again, and his voice was broken with emotion, “I have behaved badly. I ask your pardon.”

George put out his hand blindly and grasped that of his grandfather. When it was once in the old man's grip he raised his grandson with a jerk and made him look him in the face. "You forgive me?" he asked.

"With all my heart and soul," said Brendon, quietly, and after another handshake they resumed their seats. The scene which both had dreaded was over, and now they sat like two friends who had known each other for years. George felt that as Derrington had done justice to the memory of his mother, and Derrington was pleased to feel that he now had a grandson and heir worthy of his name.

"I can marry Dorothy now," said Brendon, with a contented sigh.

"If my influence can help you—yes." Derrington paused and shook his head. "But there is a lioness in the path, George."

"Mrs Ward?"

"Exactly. She will move heaven and earth to prevent the marriage."

George looked puzzled. "I see no reason why she should oppose it, if I am acknowledged as your heir."

"Nor do I. I thought myself that it was simply the money she wanted, and if you were the son-in-law she would not get her claws on the gold. But there is more in it than that. She seeks revenge."

"On me? I have never harmed her."

"It's a vicarious revenge. I believed that woman loved your father, George, and that he slighted her; that is why she wants to visit his sin—as with a vindictive spirit she may regard it—on you."

"Did Mrs Ward know my father, sir?" asked George, quickly.

"Yes. She met him at San Remo."

"Then she knew he was murdered?"



"Of course. I saw Mrs Ward the other day, George. She came here to force me to harm you and to consent to Walter marrying Dorothy."

"Oh! You never agreed to that."

"I have answered her challenge by asking you to dinner and will acknowledge you my heir. Mrs Ward will then try and make mischief."

"Can she do so?"

"Yes. She knows that I was in Mrs Jersey's house on that night."

"And you were, sir?"

Derrington made a most unexpected reply. "No, I was not."

## CHAPTER XVII

### LORD DERRINGTON EXPLAINS

**G**EORGE was rather puzzled to reconcile the apparent contradiction in Derrington's speech. The old gentleman saw his bewilderment, and before the young man could speak he anticipated his question.

"You are perplexed," he said quietly. "I thought you would be. To explain myself clearly it will be better to tell you the whole story from the beginning."

"What story?"

"The story of your mother's marriage and of my quarrel with your father. Do not be afraid, I shall say nothing to hurt your pride."

George nodded. "I am sure of that. We are friends now."

Derrington was much gratified by this speech. But he merely acknowledged it with a grunt and began his family history at once.

"Your father and I never got on well," he said frankly, "and I fear it was my fault. I wanted Percy to obey me implicitly, and as he was of an age to judge for himself he objected. You would have done the like in his case."

"I certainly should, sir. Every man should judge for himself."

"If he has brains to do so. But I fear Percy was not overburdened with brains. He was gay and thoughtless and thriftless. Your talents, George, come from your mother. She must have been a remarkable woman."

"So Mr Ireland says."

"Pooh! he was in love with her, and a man in love is incapable of giving an opinion. However, I saw your mother several times when she sang, although I never met her to speak to. She was very beautiful and had an intellectual face. Yes, George, it is from her that you inherit your brain. From my side of the family you inherit a strong will and a propensity to fight. There is Irish blood in our veins," said Derrington, grimly.

"Was my father a fighter?"

"In a way, yes. But he had not a strong will, save in resisting me."

George smiled and said nothing, but he privately thought that if Mr Percy Vane could hold his own against Derrington he must have had a stronger will than the old gentleman gave him credit for.

"However, to continue," pursued Derrington, pushing away his empty cup. "Percy saw Miss Lockwood, he fell in love with her, and finally he eloped. I wrote him a letter saying he was to return or I would never see him again. He declined to return, and remained on the Continent with his wife. I never did see him again," added Derrington, quietly, "for three years later he was murdered at San Remo."

"In his letter to you did my father say he was married?"

"He did; but at the time, as he did not say where the marriage was celebrated, I thought he mentioned it out of obstinacy."

George colored. "I don't see why you should have so misjudged my mother," he said hotly. "Admitting that she was not born in the purple, she was in a good position and had no reason to run away with my father."

"*She was in love with him, I believe.*"

"Even then she would not have eloped, unless it was to be married."

Derrington nodded. "You are perfectly right," he said; "I tried to disbelieve in the marriage, but in my own heart I knew there was one. I have behaved very badly, George."

"You have, sir. But as we are now reconciled the less said about the thing the better. You are quite sure you do not know where the marriage was celebrated?"

"No, George, I do not. After the death of your father I tried to find out, but it was impossible. Had I really seen the register of the marriage I should have acknowledged you as my heir. As a matter of fact," added Derrington, with a burst of candor, "I did not trouble much to search, as I feared lest the marriage should be verified."

George wriggled in his seat. "Let us say no more," he said.

"Very good. I have confessed my sins and I have received absolution from you. At the present moment we will leave the murder of your father at San Remo alone, and come to the appearance of Mrs Jersey in my life. You were with your grandfather Lockwood in Amelia Square. I had constituted my second son my heir, and I had relegated to obscurity the escapade of my son Percy. All was nicely settled, in my humble opinion, when Mrs Jersey appeared to make trouble. That was eight years after your father's death."

"Where was she in the mean time?"

"I cannot say. She told me nothing of her history, but from a word or two which she let slip I believe she must have been in the United States. Why she went there from San Remo, or for what reason, I cannot say. She came here to see me—we had an interview in this very room—to demand money."

"What threat did she make?"

"That she would tell where the marriage took place."

"And you bribed her to keep silence?"

Derrington winced at the scorn in his grandson's voice and took a turn up and down the room. "I am no saint, I admit," he said, "and at the time, George, I did not know that you would turn out such a fine fellow. I dreaded a scandal, and there was your uncle to be considered. I had made him my heir."

"And what about me, sir? Were the sins of my father to be placed on my shoulders?"

"I have admitted that I was in the wrong," said Derrington, impatiently, "spare me further sermons."

"I beg your pardon," said George, quietly. "But please touch as lightly as possible on these matters. We will admit that you acted according to your lights."

"False lights," said his grandfather, sadly. "However, we need speak no more on that particular point. Mrs Jersey said that she knew where the marriage was celebrated, adding that if I did not give her an annuity she would go to Lockwood and help him to prove that you were my legitimate grandson and heir."

"Did she say if the marriage was celebrated in England or abroad?"

"No, sir; Mrs Jersey was a remarkably clever woman, and if my son Percy had married her she would have made a man of him."

"Then she really was in love with my father?"

"Very deeply in love—as she told me herself. But she did not regard his memory with such veneration as to desire to aid his son. She was content that you should lose your rights, provided that I paid her an annuity. I tried in vain to learn from her

where the marriage had been celebrated. She refused to open her mouth, so I allowed her an annuity of five hundred a year——”

“That was a large sum,” interposed George.

Derrington shrugged his shoulders. “Much larger than I could afford, my good sir,” he said, “but Mrs Jersey dictated her own terms. I arranged that the money should be paid through my lawyers, and she vanished.”

“Where to?”

“I can’t say. She might have gone to rejoin Mr Jersey if there ever was such a person. She sent a messenger regularly to the office of my lawyers for the money, but did not trouble me in any way. Her next appearance was shortly after the death of your grandfather.”

“What did she want this time?”

“To set up a boarding-house in Amelia Square. She said that her life was lonely—a remark which made me think Mr Jersey was a myth—and that she wanted company. I expect she learned in some way that I was buying old Lockwood’s house.”

“Why did you buy it?”

“I have a lot of property in that district, and I wanted to round it off with this house. Ireland, in his rage at me for my treatment of your mother, would not have sold it to me. I bought the house through an agent; Mrs Jersey must have heard of the purchase, for it was then that she came to me and asked me to set her up in the house as a landlady.”

“I wonder why she did that,” said George, thoughtfully.

“She was lonely, I understand.”

George looked at his shoes. “As Eliza Stokes she lived in that house along with my mother previous to the elopement, I expect she had a kind of affection for it,”

"Well, whatever her reason was, I did what she asked. She agreed to pay me a rent, and her money was as good as any one else's. Besides, I felt that as my tenant I could keep her under my own eye. When she was away I never knew but what she might die and part with the secret to some one else, who might come on me for blackmail, also. I thought it best Mrs Jersey should have the house so she went into it and used the old furniture. I don't deny but what she was a good business woman and made the house pay. At all events she was never behindhand with her rent."

"I wonder she paid you any at all."

"Oh, she had her annuity and was afraid of pressing me too hard. I refused to let her the house on a seven years' lease. She only had it from year to year, and in that way I kept a check on her. She knew if I once lost my temper that I would throw her over and acknowledge you as my heir."

"I wish you had done so," said Brendon, moodily; "it would have saved a lot of trouble."

"I do so now," replied Derrington, testily; "better late than never. Well, Mrs Jersey lived and flourished for fifteen years. I tried to find you out, George, lest she should get at you—"

"Oh, was that why you offered to make me an allowance?"

"It was. I intended to give you a yearly income on condition that you went to Australia; then I could be sure that Mrs Jersey would not seek you out. But you refused my offer and disappeared."

"I went to college under the name of Brendon," observed George.

"And that is why Mrs Jersey never found you, and why I could not come across you until you put those advertisements about the marriage into *the papers*. It was that which—"

"Yes, so Bawdsey told me. You had me watched."

"I did," said Derrington, "and in that way I found out that you were going to stop in Mrs Jersey's house."

"How did you learn that, sir?" asked George in surprise. "I never told any one."

"Oh, yes, you told Lola."

"So I did," said Brendon, quickly; "she bothered me to come and see her, and I said that I was going to stop in the neighborhood of Amelia Square with a friend and would call on her the next day. I expect she told this to Bawdsey."

"Exactly, and Bawdsey told me. I was afraid lest you should make Mrs Jersey confess. I wrote to her and asked her to see me. She refused to come to my house, so I made up my mind to seek her out in Amelia Square. I arranged by letter with her to call about eleven o'clock at her place and see her secretly."

"Why secretly, and why at night?"

"Can't you see, George? My height and figure make me so conspicuous that I knew I would be recognized if I went in the daytime, and then people would ask themselves why Lord Derrington went to see a lodging-house keeper."

"You could have put it down to her being a tenant."

"Ah," said Derrington, grimly, "I never thought of that. I received a note from Mrs Jersey saying she would wait for me on Friday evening at eleven o'clock in her sitting-room; it was a foggy night, if you remember."

"Very foggy. I suppose you traced the house by means of the red light over the door."

"I did not trace the house at all," said Derrington, quietly. "I did not go near the house."

"But I saw you," insisted George.



"You saw my coat and a man with my tall figure, and having my association with yourself in your head you jumped to the conclusion that the figure was me."

"Then if not you, who was the man?"

"Bawdsey!" said Derrington, curtly.

George stared. "In your coat?" he said incredulously.

"It seems strange," said Derrington, "but the fact is that Bawdsey is one of the few who have got the better of me in my life. It was in this way that he prevented me from seeing Mrs Jersey. On that night I visited him at his rooms, which then were in Bloomsbury. I desired to tell him that I intended to see Mrs Jersey and to warn her against revealing anything. I don't suppose the warning was needed, as she knew when she was well off. But the fact is, Mrs Jersey was not in good health and was feeling compunction about keeping you out of your rights. I learned from Bawdsey that Mrs Jersey had written out a confession of the whole matter and that she intended to leave this to her niece, Margery Watson, so that I might be forced to continue the lease of the house."

George uttered an ejaculation. "I thought from what Margery said that there was some such confession," he remarked, "but it is missing; it was not found among her papers after her death. Unless Miss Bull took it and forced you to——"

"No," interrupted Derrington, vigorously, "she came here quietly and put the case of the poor girl to me. She also undertook that the rent would be paid regularly, and that through Miss Watson she would manage the house. I was quite satisfied with the existing arrangements, and, moreover, thought that, if such a confession were found, out of gratitude *Miss Watson might bring it to me.*"

"If Miss Bull had told her to she would have done so, but not otherwise," said George; "she is under Miss Bull's thumb."

"The best place she could be, George. The girl is a born idiot from what I saw of her. However, you know why I renewed the year-by-year lease. Where the confession is I have no idea; but the person who holds it will certainly make use of it some day to extort money, and then we will learn who killed Mrs Jersey."

"I dare say. The assassin must have taken the papers. Well?"

Derrington proceeded with his account of his doings on that night. "As I said, I went to see Bawdsey at his rooms. I took a cab, and as the fog was thick I had considerable difficulty in finding the place. The rain and fog chilled me, for I am not so young as I was, and when I arrived I was shivering. But I was too anxious to tell Bawdsey about Mrs Jersey, to trouble. He heated some water to give me a glass of hot whisky. While the water was boiling I told him, I was going to see Mrs Jersey. He asked me how I could get into the house without being admitted by one of the servants and thus run a chance of my visit being known."

"Did it never strike him that Mrs Jersey expected you and would admit you when you rang?"

"Yes, it did strike him; but he knew that I didn't want any one to know that she had a visitor so late at night."

"I don't know why you took all these precautions, sir."

Derrington smiled dryly. "Perhaps they were rather unnecessary, but I thought it best to be on the safe side. As a matter of fact, I had a latch-key."

"I thought that Mrs Jersey never allowed latch-keys."

"This one came to me when I bought the house, and was given to me by the agent. I told Mrs Jersey I had it and that I would let myself in. She expected me at eleven."

"I know she did," said George, "for on that night she asked the boarders to be in bed by eleven, and broke up her party at ten. I wondered if she was having any one to meet her then."

"She was expecting me. It was after ten when I told Bawdsey, and I explained to him that I had a latch-key. He gave me the whisky, and, being chilled, I drank it. Then I fell asleep."

George looked up suddenly. "The whisky was drugged," he guessed.

"It was," assented Derrington, "and while I was insensible Bawdsey took the latch-key out of my pocket and put on my coat. He is rather my height, so with that and the fur coat I expect he passed himself off as me to Mrs Jersey until she saw his face."

"When she did, she would have nothing to do with him. Although," added George, "he was an old boarder in the house."

"Wait till I tell you the rest," said Derrington, "and then you can give an opinion. When I woke it was after twelve. I never suspected that the whisky had been drugged, and thought that it was some sort of illness. Bawdsey was in the room when I awoke. He did not tell me that he had been to Mrs Jersey, and I now saw that it was too late to go. He advised me to see her on the morrow, saying that it was doubtful if you would speak to her on that night."

"I intended to wait till the next day, but, as a matter of fact, I became anxious to see if any one was with her, and I went down the stairs."

"By means of that secret door. Bawdsey told me."

"Well, I crept downstairs, and saw—as I thought—you. It was, of course, Bawdsey. He was standing at the door of the sitting-room. I was afraid lest you—as I thought it was—should see me, so I went upstairs again."

"And Bawdsey left the house. However, I never suspected him. I went home and found Mrs Ward waiting for me. She came to tell me that she had heard from Dorothy that you purposed to stop with Train at Mrs Jersey's house, and came to warn me."

"How good of Mrs Ward!"

"She is a dangerous woman, George. I threw my coat on yonder sofa, and she sat near it. Feeling something in the pocket, her curiosity led her to take out the something when I was absent from the room. It was a stiletto."

George started from his seat. "A stiletto?"

"Yes." Derrington opened the drawer in his desk and took out the weapon which Mrs Ward had brought. "This was between the fur and the lining of the coat. What with the weight of the coat and the position of this weapon lying along the bottom of the coat, I never suspected it. I brought it home quite unconsciously. Mrs Ward found it, took it away with her, and came the other day to accuse me of having murdered Mrs Jersey."

"How dare she do such a thing?"

"Oh, Mrs Ward is capable of all things! However you can see from what I tell you what happened. Bawdsey put the stiletto in my coat and either forgot to take it out or left it there so that I might be incriminated."

"Did he tell you this?"

"He told me, when I rebuked him too sharply, that he could get me into trouble, and explained how he had been in the house. He also referred

to the stiletto. I denied that I had seen it, and it was only when Mrs Ward brought it the other day that I saw that this part of Bawdsey's story was true."

"What did you do?"

"I accused him of having killed the woman."

"What did he say?"

"He denied that he had done so. He declared that he went to Mrs Jersey's sitting-room door close upon twelve, having let himself in noiselessly by the front door. He discovered Mrs Jersey lying dead, as she was found in the morning. On the floor was the stiletto. Fearing lest he should be accused of the crime, Bawdsey left the house quickly, but took the stiletto with him so that he might find out who had done the deed. He changed his mind or left it by mistake in my fur coat."

"Did he ask money?"

"No. He has not done so yet. But he told me very plainly that no one could prove that he had been in the house on that night, and that if he had been seen, the coat would make people think it was I."

"Exactly what I did think," said George.

"Well, I had to hold my tongue, for you see I was in a most awkward position and I could prove nothing. I bluffed Mrs Ward, but if the matter came into court things would look extremely unpleasant for me."

"I can see that," said Brendon, "but Bawdsey——"

"He has made himself secure, as no one can prove that he was in the house on that night. Even you thought it was I. I can't say for certain if Bawdsey committed the murder, or if he really did find the woman dead as he said, but he swears to his innocence. As yet he has not made any use of his power, but I am quite sure that he will try and

get money out of me, so I have asked you here to advise me about the matter."

"Do you think Bawdsey has the confession?"

"He may have. If so, he knows where the marriage was celebrated!"

Brendon mused for a time. "I think it best to do nothing at the present moment," he said. Bawdsey is friendly to me, as I saved him from being run over. If he thought I knew this he might turn crusty and make trouble. Better wait."

"For what?" asked Derrington, restlessly.

"To see what he will do. If he does blackmail you, call me in."

Derrington drew a long breath. "Yes. I think you are right," he said. "We will wait. But I don't trust that man."

"He's a scoundrel," said George, "but I know how to conquer him."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MISS BULL'S STORY

**M**ISS BULL was alone in the sitting-room of the late Mrs Jersey. Margery had gone out shopping, and the old maid, left to her own resources, amused herself, as usual, with playing Patience. With the exception of a few old ladies in the drawing-room the house was empty, and Miss Bull found the quiet very soothing. After a time she grew weary of the game and seated herself in an armchair to meditate.

Her thoughts were sad. Here she was, an old spinster dragging out a miserable old age in a London lodging-house, while her sister lived and fared sumptuously in accordance with her position. Miss Bull looked back on all the trials she had passed through, and wondered how she had been able to stand them. For a moment a revolt took place in her breast at the cruel fate she had endured, but the feeling died away, and she relapsed into the patient misery which was her usual frame of mind. "It can't last much longer," said Miss Bull, with a sigh. "I am getting old, and the end is coming. The sooner the better."

As she gave vent to this dreary sentence there was a ring at the door. Miss Bull paid little attention to it, as she never had any visitors. But this day proved to be an exception, for George was admitted into the room. He advanced cordially toward Miss Bull.

"I have come to see you again, you see," said *Brendon*.

Miss Bull gave him her hand with a great deal of pleasure, and invited him to be seated. Now that she had thawed towards George she treated him kindly, and her face wore a less stony look. As the sun melts the frost, so did the reserved nature of the old maid melt when in the sunshine of Brendon's presence. More than that, Miss Bull actually congratulated herself on Margery's absence, as it gave her a chance of having the company of George all to herself.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr Brendon," she said, ringing the bell. "You will have some tea?"

"Thank you," replied Brendon, who thought she might thaw still more under the influence of the tea-urn. "I suppose you wonder why I have come again so soon?"

Miss Bull smiled in her calm way. "You have come to make further inquiries likely to forward your fight for your birthright?"

George laughed. "There's no need for that, thank God," said he; "my grandfather has agreed to acknowledge me."

"Then there was a marriage?"

"I cannot be certain of that yet. How do you know about that?"

Miss Bull answered quietly: "You told me last time you were here that you were Lord Derrington's grandson, and I heard that there was some doubt about the legitimacy."

"I know it was common talk at one time," replied Brendon, satisfied with this explanation. "Did Mrs Jersey ever speak about it?"

"No. She never did. What did she know about it?"

"I think you can best answer that question, Miss Bull."

George looked hard at her, and a faint tinge of



color crept into her face. Before she could reply with a counter-question the servant brought in the tea. Miss Bull waited to supply George with a cup before she spoke. By that time the servant had left the room, and the door, as Miss Bull assured herself, was closed.

"I don't know to what you allude, Mr Brendon."

"Perhaps if I allude to your life in San Remo you——"

Miss Bull started to her feet and the cup she held fell on the carpet. "San Remo," she muttered.

"Yes, Miss Howard," said Brendon, using her real name purposely.

The little old maid put one thin hand to her head. "Miss Howard!"

"The daughter of the late General Howard!" said George.

"My father was a general."

"He was. General Howard. You are Miss Jenny Howard."

Miss Bull started and then sat down. Her face expressed pain. "He used to call me Jenny. Jenny Howard. Yes, there was a happy girl of that name, but she—she died."

"Not at all," said Brendon, briskly, to arouse her from this dreamy state. "She lived and changed her name to Bull."

The woman pushed back her white hair and made an effort to be calm. But her lip quivered. "Why have you come here to awaken these painful memories?" she asked.

"Because I wish to know how my father came by his death."

"I do not know—indeed, I do not know," moaned Miss Bull, putting out her hand as though to ward off the thought.

"You may not know for certain, but you have some idea. Your sister, Mrs Ward——"

Miss Bull's face flushed crimson, and she drew a deep breath. "Oh, it's Violet's work, is it?" she said, and her eyes grew hard. "And pray, Mr. Brendon, has she sent you to cross-question me?"

"No. I come on my own behalf. You knew my father?"

"Percy Vane. Yes, I knew him. He loved me—ah, indeed he did! That night he asked me to be his wife, and had he not been murdered——"

"Did he ask you when he was taking you home?" asked George, wondering how Miss Bull would have behaved as his stepmother.

"Taking me home? He never did that on the night of the ball."

"Your sister, Mrs Ward——"

"I have no sister. I disown Violet. She is a wicked woman!"

George was quite of this opinion, yet for the sake of Dorothy he dissented. "She has her good points, Miss Bull."

"No! no! She has no good points. She is selfish, vain, cruel, and deceitful. A child of the devil. How do you know that I am her sister? and how did you come to learn my name?"

"Lord Derrington told me, and it was told to him by Mr Ireland."

"Your guardian." Miss Bull tapped her hand on the woodwork of her chair. "He recognized me when I called to see him on that day about the lease." But he promised to hold his tongue."

"He would have done so had he not been startled by meeting Mrs Ward and recognizing in her the woman who had left the ball with my father."

"And Violet admitted this?"

"No. She said that you had left the ball with

my father. It was you who wore the blue domino and the holly sprig."

"Liar! Liar!" muttered Miss Bull; "but she is always the same. When I saw her at the music-hall the other night her face wore the same false smile. Oh, that I could see her punished as she deserves!"

"God will punish her, Miss Bull."

"He has delayed long," said the old maid with a bitter smile. "My sister has enjoyed the good things of this life. She has had money, position, praise, and all that a woman desires. As for myself—" She looked round the room and burst into a bitter laugh. "Yet Jenny Howard was always considered the prettier sister of the two."

"Then it really was Mrs Ward who left the ball."

"It was. She lays the blame on my shoulders—" Miss Bull paused, and her mouth worked nervously. "Does she accuse me of the crime?"

"No. She says that you left Mr Vane at the gate of the hotel."

"Oh," muttered Miss Bull, "Percy came as far as that with her, did he? And she said he left her at the door of the room where the ball was being held. Liar! Liar! She always was. She always will be. Can the leopard change his spots?"

By this time the ice in Miss Bull's nature had melted under the heat of her indignation. She walked hurriedly up and down the room, her eyes bright and her cheeks flushed. George was pleased to see this, as he thought she was the more likely to tell the truth when thus moved by emotion than if she had remained calm. Miss Bull was so angered by the memory of her wrongs that she struck her hand against the mantelpiece so as to inflict pain. The shock seemed to nerve her, for she drew a long breath and returned to her seat. With her eyes *fixed on George* she began abruptly.

"Violet has told her story," she said, "now I will tell you mine. I want to know, however, exactly what she said, in the exact words if you can remember them."

"I did not hear her speak," confessed George; "it was my grandfather and Mr Ireland to whom she told the story."

"Story! Fable! Lie! Romance!" said Miss Bull, vehemently. "Well, tell me what you can remember!"

This George did as concisely as possible, for he feared lest Margery should interrupt the interview. Miss Bull listened with a downcast face and pursed-up lips. Not a word did she say, but when George ended she looked up with a bitter smile.

"She has simply put herself in my place," she said. "Wait!"

For a moment or so she tried to compose herself. Then she raised her head and looked her visitor squarely in the eyes. "I am going to tell the truth," said Miss Bull, bravely, "therefore I have no need to shun your gaze. Mr Brendon, I loved your father."

"So Mrs Ward said."

"And Violet loved him also."

"He must have been a singularly attractive man," remarked Brendon, wondering at this revelation. "My mother eloped with him; her maid was in love with him, and now you and Mrs Ward——"

"Oh, Violet really did not love him. It was simply a desire to take him from me that made her behave as she did. Violet never loved any one in her life, save the person she sees in the mirror every day. A selfish woman, Mr Brendon, and a wicked one."

This was no news to George, so he strove to coax her to tell him that which he wished to know. "I don't quite understand, but if you will relate the story——"

"I shall do so at once. You may as well know all, and know also what a bad woman I have for a sister. If she was dying," cried Miss Bull, vehemently, "I wouldn't raise a finger to save her life."

"We should forgive our enemies," hinted George.

"I can't forgive her. I never will forgive her. She ruined my life, George Brendon, she ruined my life."

Brendon said nothing, and in a few moments Miss Bull composed herself sufficiently to tell what she knew. "My father was General Howard," she said quietly, "and Violet was my only sister. We never got on well together. Violet was jealous of admiration, and as I was said to be prettier than she was she hated me intensely. Whenever any one liked me Violet would do her best to take him away from me."

"I can quite believe that," said George, recalling Mrs Ward's arts.

"She did not always succeed, however," continued Miss Bull, with a flush. "I had my admirers also, and some I could keep. But when Violet could manage it, she always took them away."

"You hinted that she took my father away," said Brendon.

"She did—at least she tried to. But if he had not been murdered I should have been Mrs Vane in spite of Violet's arts."

"Well, tell me how you came to San Remo and met my father."

"Oh, I knew him before that. We were six months at Como and saw your father frequently then. He and the General used to talk politics. Mr Vane was always bringing us books and magazines, and we used to climb Mount Bisbino. What a delightful summer that was! I remember you then," she added, looking at George with interest. "You were scarcely two years old—a dear, good, fair little fel-

low. I met you and the nurse sometimes, and often carried you."

"Was the nurse's name Eliza Stokes?"

"No. It was—let me see, some Scotch name—Jane Fraser, I think."

"Ah! Then Eliza Stokes was not at Como?"

"I never saw her. Mr Vane told me that you had had another nurse, but that he had to dismiss her at Milan for impertinence."

George saw that Miss Bull was not keeping strictly to the truth, and corrected her at once, "You knew Eliza Stokes at San Remo?"

"So I did, I quite forgot." Miss Bull put her hand to her head with a puzzled air. "But since my illness I have forgotten so much. It is all a blank to me. Tell me, Mr Brendon, have you ever felt as though you were a ghost?"

"No," replied George, keeping his countenance with difficulty. "I don't think I ever experienced that feeling."

Miss Bull looked vaguely at the window. "It is a strange feeling," after which remark she lapsed into silence, still staring.

Brendon remembered that she had been in an asylum, and thought that her mind was still weak. It might be that after all she had not told an untruth, but had quite forgotten Eliza Stokes. George was confirmed in his supposition by her next remark.

"Eliza Stokes. I remember. Mrs Jersey."

"You knew she was Mrs Jersey?"

"Yes. That was why I came to this house."

"Did you like her then?"

Miss Bull's eyes flashed. "She was another Violet. I hated her, oh, how I hated her! I found her through my sister mentioning that Lord Derrington had given her this house, so I came here to board."

"But your sister knows nothing about you. She

says you ran away and that it was supposed you were dead."

Miss Bull laughed bitterly. "My sister knows perfectly well that I live here, but it suits her to disown the relationship. It is my wish also, and for that reason I changed my name. No one would recognize pretty Jenny Howard in poor Miss Bull." She paused for a moment and then continued: "Yes. I knew that Eliza Stokes had become Mrs Jersey, and that is why I came here."

"But if you hated her——"

"I did—I did, but she was the only person who could talk about Mr Vane. She loved him also, but not as I did, and we have talked for hours in this very room. We quarreled, certainly, but at times she was very nice. I miss our talks greatly."

It really seemed as though Miss Bull was weak in the head. She admitted to hating Mrs Jersey, and yet she came to stop with her. It might be that Mrs Jersey looked after her as a kind of keeper and that she acted the tyrant. At that moment, as though answering his thought, Miss Bull made a sudden observation. "Mrs Jersey knew that I had been in an asylum. She would have sent me back if she could, the vile woman! But I was never afraid of her, never. And she always talked to me of Mr Vane," concluded Miss Bull in a softer tone.

"Did she know who killed him?"

Miss Bull shook her head. "No. She never knew. No one ever knew. I sometimes thought that Violet—but she declared that he left her at the door of the ballroom."

"Miss Bull," said George, growing impatient of this disconnected recital, "will you go on with your story?"

"Story—yes, it is a story—a sad romance." She *passed her hand again over her forehead as though*

wearied, and resumed with an effort. "Mr Vane left Como and came to Milan; afterward he went on to San Remo. My father, who liked his society, joined him there. We stopped at the Hotel d'Angleterre. Eliza Stokes was a housemaid there, and it was while attending to our bedroom that she told me she had been your nurse. She was a large, stout girl with red cheeks. As Mrs Jersey she was vastly improved, but as a girl—" Miss Bull shuddered in a prim way and continued: "Yet, she had her admirers. A waiter, called George Rates, wished to marry her. She had accepted him, but while within sight of Mr Vane she could not love him."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, Eliza used to spy on Mr Vane and follow him in his walks. She was quite insane about him. I told Mr Vane, and he kept away from the hotel. And George Rates was jealous of Eliza's love for Mr Vane. But he never loved her, nor Violet—he loved no one but me."

"And he told you so at the masked ball?"

"Yes. There was to be a masked ball, and both Violet and I were anxious to go. We made a friend of Eliza and she got us two blue dominoes. That we might recognize one another we each wore a sprig of yellow holly. My father was supposed to know nothing about the matter, but we told a young Oxford cousin of ours. He met us at the ball, and afterward took Violet away. I found Mr Vane, and we danced together. He did not know me at first, but afterward, when we went into a quiet room, I unmasked. He was vexed at first that I and Violet should come to the ball unattended, as he said my father would be so angry, which was quite true. Then he told me that he loved me, and asked me to become his wife. I accepted, and he kissed me." Miss Bull paused, moved



by an emotion too deep for words. "I was fond of you as a baby, George, and he—your father, knew I would be a good mother to you."

"Did he speak of his first wife—of my mother?"

"Yes. He told me how dearly he had loved her."

"Did he say where the marriage was celebrated?"

"No. I never thought to ask him. I always thought there was a marriage—why should I not?—until I later heard that Lord Derrington denied that such had taken place. But that was after I came out of the asylum," added Miss Bull with a troubled air, "so it might be my fancy."

"No. It is true. Lord Derrington did deny the marriage; but he now recognizes that it took place. We wish to find where."

"I cannot help you, Mr Brendon. Mr Vane never mentioned it to me. He told me that he loved me. Then he went away to get me an ice, and said he would take me home and return for Violet. I waited, but as he did not appear I went to look for him. He was gone——"

"With your sister?"

"Yes," said Miss Bull, clenching her fists. "Violet overheard a part of our conversation. She had just come down from the box of the Marchesa Beltrami——"

"That was where she unmasked and Mr Ireland recognized her."

"She must have seen me with Mr Vane," continued Miss Bull, taking no notice of this interruption, "so she stole behind us and heard what we were to one another. Then she slipped on her mask and followed Mr Vane. She said she did not want an ice, but that she desired to go home at once. Mr Vane wanted to wait for her——"

"For Violet?"

"Yes. He thought that I had run after him, and

as Violet wore a blue domino with the sprig of holly he fancied she was me."

"I understand. So he took her home."

"She said he left her at the door, and then came back to look for—for Violet," said Miss Bull, contemptuously; "she disguised her voice and he quite thought she was myself. But from what Mr Ireland said Mr Vane saw Violet home to the gates of the hotel. I waited for a time, and as your father did not come back I ran home alone. Violet was in our bedroom and said that Mr Vane had left her at the door of the ballroom and had gone back for me. Then the next morning we heard of the murder. I never knew, until you told me, how Violet had managed to get Mr Vane away from me."

"She tricked you," said George, sympathizingly.

"She tricked every one. When I heard of your father's death I fell very ill. The world became a blank to me. When I came to myself I was in an asylum. Then I grew better and was let out. My father died, and an annuity was allowed to me. I heard about Mrs Jersey taking this house, and wishing for some one to talk to about your father I came here, and here I have been ever since. A lonely woman, Mr Bendon, but I find Margery a great comfort."

"Then you do not know who killed my father?"

"No." Miss Bull shook her head. "He was struck down on the parade when returning to the ballroom. It must have been after he saw my sister home."

"Do you think Mrs Ward knows the truth?"

"She might. Perhaps some one followed, and Violet might have been mistaken for some person. I know there was a married woman in San Remo deeply in love with Mr Vane——"

"What an attractive man he must have been!"

"Oh, he was the handsomest man in the world," cried Miss Bull, with genuine enthusiasm, "and so kind. No wonder Eliza Stokes loved him. But he loved no one but me—no one but me."

"What did Eliza Stokes say when she heard of his death?"

"Oh, she almost went out of her mind! I did altogether," said poor Miss Bull, with a wan smile; "and as they found her a nuisance in the hotel she went away. George Rates went also."

"Did she marry him?"

"No. I asked her when I met her here as Mrs Jersey. She said that she returned to England and that Rates had been run over and killed in the street. She then went to America and married Mr Jersey. He died and left her some money. Then she set up this house."

"So she said nothing of the annuity from Lord Derrington?"

"No. It wasn't to her interest to do so. She could hold her tongue when she liked. We very often quarreled, but on the whole we were as good friends as two women well could be who had loved the same man."

George rose to go. "Thank you for telling me so much, Miss Bull," he said. "What was the name of the woman who loved my father?"

"Oh, she was a common woman who kept a shop. Velez was the name."

"Velez," cried George; and added to himself: "So that is how Lola knows."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE INQUIRY AGENT

**A**S George stepped out of the front door he came face to face with Bawdsey, who was mounting the steps. The man seemed excited, and carried a carelessly folded newspaper which he had apparently been reading. He did not seem pleased to meet Brendon, and looked at him in a suspicious manner.

"I didn't expect to see you here!" he said, with a certain degree of roughness.

"I did not know that this house was interdicted to me," replied Brendon, sharply. He liked neither the tone nor the peremptory manner of Bawdsey, and, moreover, was not prepossessed in his favor by the report which Lord Derrington had made of the man's duplicity. "I am glad to meet you, however," continued George, "as I wish to have a few words."

"I am too busy to give you any time," retorted Bawdsey, and tried to enter the house.

"Nevertheless, you will give me a quarter of an hour," said George, blocking the doorway with his stalwart form. "What I have to say cannot be left until a more convenient period."

"I tell you I am busy, Mr Brendon."

"And I tell you that I intend to have this interview," rejoined Brendon, imperiously. "You talk a great deal about gratitude, Bawdsey, yet you are unwilling to put yourself out for me in the least degree."

Bawdsey became penitent at once. "It is true, Mr Brendon. But I am very worried." He cast a glance at the newspaper in his hand. "However, you have first call upon my time, so we will go to my room."

"That's as it should be."

No more words passed. Bawdsey mounted the stairs and led George into the well-remembered room. Brendon took a chair, and Bawdsey, with an anxious look, threw himself into another. The man's face was flushed, his red hair was in disorder, and his eyes were bright. As a rule he was calm and self-controlled, so George conjectured that something particularly important must have occurred to upset him. However, Bawdsey's troubles were none of his business, and he began talking at once of his reason for seeking the interview. "I had a conversation with Lord Derrington the other evening," he said deliberately, "and we talked of you."

"Then you heard no good of me," replied Bawdsey, with a sneer. "Lord Derrington does not like me."

"That matters little. No liking can exist between a man in Lord Derrington's position and his paid servant."

"Oh, you call me that, do you, sir?"

"What else are you? Lord Derrington engaged you as his agent to watch me, and that you have done."

"Not lately. I have given you a free hand."

"In any case I have a free hand," said George, loftily. "You were grateful enough for my service in saving your life to release me from your espionage, but had you not done so I should have taken means to put a stop to your dogging my footsteps."

"You would not have known had I not told you, Mr Brendon."

"Oh, yes, I should. In any case, I should have seen my grandfather, and he would have told me."

"No, sir. He is your enemy."

"That is where you are wrong, Bawdsey. He is my friend."

The detective looked astonished. "Do you mean to say that Lord Derrington has climbed down?" he demanded incredulously.

"It is strange, is it not," said George, in a bantering tone, "but, as a matter of fact, after a long conversation, Lord Derrington and myself came to understand one another. He intends to recognize me as his heir."

"Has he then learnt where the marriage took place?" asked Bawdsey, starting from his seat, and again glancing anxiously at the newspaper which lay on a small table at his elbow.

"No. We have yet to find that out. But he is quite satisfied from the hints of the late Mrs Jersey that a marriage did take place, and he wishes to make amends to me for his unjust conduct as regards my mother's memory and myself."

"Whew! What means did you take to force him to recognize you?"

"I used no force at all," responded Brendon, very dryly.

"Lord Derrington would not climb down unless he were made to."

"As a matter of fact he did. The olive branch was held out by him. All this is none of your business, Mr Bawdsey, and I only tell it to you to clear the ground for what I am about to say."

"It's something disagreeable, I bet," said Bawdsey, scanning the set face of his visitor.

"Your penetration does you credit, sir. It is disagreeable."

Bawdsey settled himself comfortably in his chair.

"Then the sooner we grasp the nettle the sooner will the pain be over," he said, with quite an Eastern wealth of parable. "But first, Mr Brendon, I should like to know your exact position."

"Oh, that is easily explained, and there is no reason why you should not know what all London will know soon. Lord Derrington will join with me in searching for the register of marriage, and meanwhile will recognize me as his grandson and the heir to his estates."

"Not a very large income for a future peer," murmured Bawdsey.

George took no notice of this. "In a fortnight I leave my Kensington rooms and take up my residence with Lord Derrington in St Giles Square. Then I shall assume my real name of George Vane."

"And you will marry Miss Ward, I suppose."

"That is entirely my business," said George, placidly. "You will gain nothing by insolence, Bawdsey."

The man rose with a wounded air. "Upon my word, Mr Vane," he said, giving George his correct name to show that he recognized his new position, "I have not the slightest intention of being insolent. I am glad for your sake that things are as they are, and pleased for my own, since Lola may now give up thoughts of you and turn to me."

"That's all very well, Bawdsey," said Brendon quietly. "You profess a great friendship for me, but how can I trust you?"

"I have never deceived you yet."

"I have not given you the chance of doing so; but if the opportunity offered, and it was convenient to you, I am quite sure you would sell me—as the saying goes—to the highest bidder."

"Why should you doubt me?" asked Bawdsey, still *wounded*.

"I can only judge the future by the past, and since you are quite ready to play Lord Derrington false——"

"Who says that?" cried the man, sitting down, but looking defiant.

"I say so. Lord Derrington has told me all."

"All what?" demanded Bawdsey, willfully ignorant.

"All that took place on the night when you came to this house to impersonate him."

Bawdsey laughed, and his face cleared. "If that is your disagreeable business, sir, I can easily put that to rights."

"Can you explain why you drugged him, why you threatened him?"

"I did not threaten him."

"Lord Derrington informed me that you threatened to get him into trouble. That was why he consulted me, and that is why I have come to tell you that if you fight Lord Derrington you will fight me also. Lord Derrington is old, but I am young, and I am quite equal to dealing with you."

"I never denied that," said Bawdsey, calmly. "I quite recognize that you are a strong man, Mr Vane, although it is not to my interest to admit as much."

"That's your business," rejoined George, coolly. "I play with all my cards on the table. What those are which you have concealed I do not know, but I am quite prepared to play the game. And at the present moment you need not call me by my father's name. I have not yet assumed my position. When I do, George Vane will have nothing to do with you."

"But George Brendon has," said Bawdsey, with a flash of his eyes. "Don't press too hard, Mr Brendon. I am willing to do you a service, and you are misjudging me."



"I am sorry you should think so. Let us cease this bickering. I am willing to hear what you have to say."

"If you are satisfied with my explanation, will you endeavor to get Lola to marry me?"

"That has nothing to do with me."

"But you have influence with her."

"It shall not be used to make her miserable. I know nothing about you save what my grandfather told me, and his report does not bias me in your favor. For all I know you might make poor Lola the worst husband in the world."

Bawdsey shrugged his shoulders. "Lola is well able to look after herself," he said. "I think I mentioned that before. But if you are satisfied with what I am about to tell you, will you help me?"

"I'll do my best," said George, impatiently. "Lola is sure to lose this engagement sooner or later through her vile temper. I do not want to see her on the streets again, and she may as well be supported by you in a respectable manner as by any one else. Besides, as you truly say, she can take care of her own skin. But I shall not advise her to marry you unless you prove to me that you did not intend to blackmail Lord Derrington."

"Nothing was further from my thoughts," said Bawdsey, earnestly; "it was to my interest that your grandfather should hold his tongue about my having been to this house—"

"He would not have known had you not told him voluntarily."

"Oh, yes, he would have discovered in some way. I thought it best to be on the right side by confessing voluntarily what I had done. I said I could get him into trouble—and I admit that I did *threaten* him so far—simply to make him hold his *tongue*."

"You were afraid lest you should be accused of the crime?"

Bawdsey looked at George in surprise. "That possibility never crossed my mind," he replied calmly. "I certainly did not kill the woman. Do you think I did, Mr Brendon?"

George shrugged his shoulders. "Going by circumstantial evidence——"

"Oh!" Bawdsey flipped away that objection with a snap of his fingers, "that's all right; I will explain. No, Mr Brendon; why I wished Lord Derrington to be silent was that I might carry out my plans so as to learn who killed Mrs Jersey."

"Then you are looking after the case?"

"On behalf of Lord Derrington. He has an idea that the assassin became possessed of a confession which Mrs Jersey left behind her——"

"How do you know she left it?"

"Because I knew Mrs Jersey very well, and, as I told you long since, I was once a boarder here. One day she let slip that she had some one in her power, and would leave the evidence of that power behind her so that her niece might benefit. I told this to Lord Derrington. He insisted that I should try and discover the assassin so as to get that confession, which compromises him, back again. To spur me on he has promised me a reward of a thousand pounds should I obtain the confession and the conviction of the assassin. As I want money to marry Lola, I am doing my best. I came to live here for that purpose. Lord Derrington talking of my visit to the house on the night of the crime would have jeopardized my plans, therefore I was obliged—as you say—to threaten him so as to make him keep silent. So far, do you blame me, Mr Brendon?"

"No," replied George, after some thought, "the

end justifies the means. But you might have adopted less rascally means."

"I have not adopted any. I have not asked Lord Derrington for money, so I am not a blackmailer; nor do I intend to claim from him anything but what is justly mine."

"And what is justly yours, if you please?"

"The reward of one thousand pounds for the discovery of the assassin."

"Oh! Have you learned who killed her?"

"Not yet, but I may learn. At present I confess I am in fault."

George pondered a little. So far Bawdsey spoke frankly enough; but he could not help mistrusting him. However, since the man was in the telling vein, he thought it best to betray no doubts lest Bawdsey should turn rusty. "Well, the discovery is in your own hands," he said, "and I sincerely trust you will gain that thousand pounds. I am as unwilling as my grandfather that Mrs Jersey's connection with this unfortunate business should become public. I am perfectly convinced that the person who took that confession stabbed the unfortunate woman."

"Do you think so?" asked Bawdsey, stealing a glance at the newspaper.

George nodded. "The confession was written. I learned that much from Margery. Mrs Jersey told her it was a story. Well, as the confession was not found among Mrs Jersey's papers when she died, it must have been taken by someone. But I can't think what interest such a thing can have had for any one unless——"

"Unless what, Mr Brendon?"

"Unless it contained the name of the person who assassinated my father."

"How could Mrs Jersey know that?"

"She was at San Remo when my father was killed; she loved him and she used to follow him. How I learned these things, Bawdsey, does not matter. But it is just possible that Mrs Jersey—or Eliza Stokes as she was then—might have some knowledge of who committed the crime. If that was set down in her confession (as is highly probable), I can quite understand that the original assassin killed her to gain a dangerous document such as it undoubtedly was."

"Then you think that the assassin of your father was also the assassin of Mrs Jersey?"

"I fancy so, as I can explain the disappearance of the confession in no other way. And if I remember rightly, Bawdsey, it was you who said that the San Remo crime was connected with the one committed in this house."

"I did say so," replied Bawdsey, thoughtfully. He pondered for a few minutes and then looked up briskly. "Well, Mr Brendon, that point cannot be settled without proof, and there is no use our wasting time in indulging in vain speculations. Let me tell you about the night I went to see Mrs Jersey."

"Go on," said Brendon, crossing his legs. "I am all attention."

"I knew before your grandfather came to see me that you were about to pass the night here. Lola told me."

"Yes, I was foolish enough to tell her; though, to be sure, I had no great reason to conceal my visit to Train. I never knew that a murder would take place. So Lola told you?"

Bawdsey nodded. "She did. But I never intended to bother about the matter, as I did not think there was anything in your visit. But Lord Derrington came and put a different complexion on the affair."

It was his belief that you intended to force Mrs Jersey into confessing about the marriage."

"I came to appeal to her," said Brendon, dryly. "There was no thought of forcing in my mind."

"Lord Derrington judged you by himself and thought there might be. I rather agreed with him. Then, knowing his temper, I fancied if he went to see Mrs Jersey there would be a row and a scandal, and I did not want that to happen. I was making a very good thing out of Lord Derrington," admitted Bawdsey, frankly, "and if a scandal had taken place my occupation would have been gone. I therefore determined to drug him and to go myself."

"But why in his coat?"

"I thought that Mrs Jersey might not admit me."

George pounced upon him at once. "There was no need that she should do so. You took the latch-key my grandfather carried."

"Oh, you know that, do you?" said Bawdsey, composedly. "Then I may as well be absolutely frank."

"It is your best course."

"Oh, I'm not on my trial, Mr Brendon. It is only my friendship for you that is making me speak out."

"I accept that excuse. Go on."

Bawdsey shrugged his shoulders to show his annoyance at the uncompromising attitude of his visitor. "I feared lest Mrs Jersey should order me out of the house unless I could gain time by being mistaken for Lord Derrington. I drugged the old gentleman, and then, taking his coat and the latch-key, I went to see Mrs Jersey."

"At what time were you there?"

"Some time before twelve. I cannot say for certain. Well, Mr Brendon, I let myself in with the latch-key, and I found the house by the red light

over the door. In former years it had been my custom to guide myself in that way. I told Lola so."

"Why did you tell her that?"

"Oh, she knew that you were going late to the house and made a fuss about the chance of your being lost in the fog. I said that probably Train would tell you of the red light, and that you could guide yourself by that."

"Humph. Lola was always unnecessarily kind," said George. "Well?"

"Well, I closed the door softly and went into the sitting-room."

"You knew where that was?"

"Of course. Don't I tell you I once lived in this house? I entered the sitting-room. The lamp was burning, and Mrs Jersey was seated at the table." Bawdsey shuddered. "There is no need to tell you more. I left the room at once, for the sight horrified me."

"Why did you pause in the hall?"

"I thought I heard a footstep on the stairs, and the shock gave me one of my fits—the fear of open spaces, you know. How did you come to learn that I paused in the hall?"

"Because I had come down the stairs to see who was with Mrs Jersey."

"Ah! Then it must have been your footstep I heard," said the detective. "Well, I soon recovered, and left the house."

"What about the stiletto?"

"It was lying on the floor near the table. I saw it glittering in the lamplight. As there was blood on it and I saw the wound, I knew that Mrs Jersey had been killed by it. I slipped it into my pocket with a vague idea that thereby I might trace the assassin."

"Did you leave it purposely in the coat?"

"No," said Bawdsey, frankly. "I did not. I was so moved and—as a woman would say—flustered by the death, that I forgot all about it. Lord Derrington woke up and went home. I said nothing about the murder to him at the time. I had not the nerve. It was only after he departed that I remembered the stiletto. I thought he might make a row and accuse me of the crime. But he said nothing, and I judged it wise to let sleeping dogs lie. So that is all I can tell you, Mr Brendon, and you will see that I am not such a bad man as you try to make out."

"Oh, you have spoken clearly enough," said George. Then after a pause, "Yes, I think you are honest, so far as I can judge. I trust you."

Bawdsey looked delighted. "Will you have a glass of wine with me to show that?" he asked rising.

"On the Arab principle of bread and salt?" said Brendon. "Certainly."

Bawdsey nodded in a pleased manner, and went to his sideboard at the end of the room. George mechanically took up the newspaper. His eyes were caught by a cross-heading—"Strange Affair in an Essex Church," and by the words "destruction of the registers." Just as he was about to glance over the article, never thinking what it meant to him, Bawdsey returned with the wine and two glasses. He uttered an exclamation of dismay when he saw the paper in George's hand.

"Hang it, I never meant you to see that!" he said.

"Why not?" replied George. "Is it this news about a lady trying to tear the registers?" He started and looked at Bawdsey, who was uneasy and pale. "It's Lola!" said George.

"No, and yet—why should you not know? I believe it is Lola, though no name is mentioned."

George picked up the paper again and read rapidly. No name was mentioned, as it was said that the strange lady who had been arrested refused to give any name. It seemed that she went to Wargrove Church and asked to see the registers for a certain year—the registers of marriage. The sexton took the fee and showed the books. Then it appeared that the strange lady searched for an hour. The sexton left the vestry for a few minutes. When he returned he saw that she had torn a page out of the book. Being taken by surprise she had tried to conceal her theft, but the sexton seized her, rescued the torn page, and called for assistance. The end of it was that the strange lady—who was described as having a foreign air—was arrested and placed in prison. “It is Lola,” said George, breathlessly.”

“Yes,” assented Bawdsey, also pale. “She evidently tried to destroy the evidence of your mother’s marriage.”

George gave a cry. “Wargrove,” he said, “Wargrove in Essex. It was in the parish church that the marriage took place. And Lola knew—Lola——” he paused. The eyes of the two men met.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE TROUBLE OF LOLA

**I**T was four o'clock when George left Bawdsey. The two had spoken little of the newspaper paragraph which informed them of Lola's escapade. Although her name was not mentioned there was no doubt in the mind of Brendon that she was the culprit. The newspaper gave the year of the book when the sheet was torn, and that corresponded to the year when Percy Vane married—or had been supposed to marry—Rosina Lockwood. And this was the explanation of Lola's absence from town. She had not fled from the rebuke of Brendon, but had gone to do him an injury by destroying the evidence of his parents' marriage. This finally was the meaning of her wild threat to Dorothy. By preventing George from proving his legitimacy, Lola hoped to put a final end to his chance of making Miss Ward his wife.

Bawdsey was much upset over the news. He would have flown immediately to Wargrove, but some special business kept him in town. However, he proposed to go the next morning by the first train. Bawdsey did not think that Brendon had sufficient interest in Lola to go down to Wargrove at once. But George was going that very day, all the same. Lola could not have known that his parents had been married at Wargrove without having seen Mrs Jersey's confession wherein the fact was *probably mentioned*. Therefore she must have obtained

the confession in some way. How she achieved this, George could not conjecture. Then he thought of Lola's hot Spanish blood, of the stiletto—a peculiarly foreign weapon—and shuddered. It occurred to him that Lola herself must have stabbed the woman.

However, he put this thought aside for the moment and set about getting to Wargrove. On consulting an A. B. C. he found that a train left Liverpool Street Station for Southend at ten minutes past five, and that Wargrove was a tiny rural town which could be reached in an hour. Ever quick and expeditious in his movements, George had entered a Strand shop to buy the railway guide, and, having ascertained about the train, he simply stepped into his cab and ordered the man to drive to Liverpool Street. At the appointed time he was on his way down the country.

This precipitancy of action was due to a dread lest Bawdsey should change his mind and see Lola first. Certainly the detective had spoken frankly, and his conduct appeared to be dictated by sentiments of honor. Nevertheless, George felt that Bawdsey was playing a part and that this apparent honesty was not his real character. It behooved him to be on his guard against him; and to know as much about the death of Mrs Jersey as Bawdsey did, so as to be able to counterplot him if necessary. From the fact that she was in Wargrove, Lola evidently had possession of the confession. If Bawdsey saw her he would doubtless try and get it from her, to learn the name of Percy Vane's assassin. George wished therefore to forestall Bawdsey, and to make Lola surrender the confession—always presuming she had it—to himself. For this reason he departed quickly for Wargrove. At the Liverpool Street Station he examined all the passengers as they entered the train. Bawdsey did not put in an appear-

ance, and as the next train would not depart for another two hours George felt that he had stolen a march on the detective. Bawdsey would never think that he had acted with such promptitude.

It was a dull journey, as Brendon was worried by a commercial traveler who would talk politics. George put him off as civilly as possible, and finally turned his prattle—for it was little else—to his own advantage by asking for the whereabouts of Wargrove. It seemed that the new town of Wargrove was the place where the train stopped, but Old Wargrove was three miles distant, and it was there that the parish church was situated. The commercial traveler followed up this information with many details concerning the manners and customs of the natives, which bored George to distraction. However, he listened quietly, and paid as little attention as was consistent with politeness. His officious companion watched for the station, and roared out the name when the train stopped. George thanked him and alighted, glad to be relieved of such a weary talker. And till the train was moving the man leaned out of the window shouting directions as to the best way to reach Old Wargrove.

As it proved there was no necessity for George to go there. Lola was stopping in the policeman's house prior to her removal to the prison at Chelmsford. Her attempt at robbery had been committed on the previous day, and Brendon thought she would have already been removed. However, he was informed that there was some delay owing to the illness of the Chelmsford inspector, and therefore Lola would have to remain in Wargrove for another twelve hours. Brendon was glad to hear this, as it would save him a long journey. He thanked the policeman who had explained, and was directed by the man to the house of his superior

officer, which was on the outskirts of the town. George soon found a semi-detached house with a notice on it, and on knocking at the door explained his errand to a brisk little woman. She pursed up her lips, looked inquisitively at him with bright eyes, and called her husband. The policeman was a burly, slow-witted, fat man who seemed nervous on being asked for a sight of the prisoner, for such Lola was to all intents and purposes. He did not want to exceed his duty. George produced a sovereign, but the official, although his eyes twinkled, hesitated to take the bribe. It was then that Mrs Policeman came to Brendon's assistance.

"Nonsense, Jeremiah," she said briskly. "Let the young gentleman see his young lady. She's dying to have a sight of him."

"How do you know that she is my young lady?" asked George.

Mrs Policeman nodded with her arms akimbo. "Why she's been crying out in that foreign way of hers for George—George—"

"That is my name certainly."

"And you are her gentleman. She told me what you were like, and cried all the time, poor soul. Tall, fair, with eyes of blue."

"It's all very well," grumbled Jeremiah. "But 'tis against the law."

"You can be present at our interview if you like."

"There, Jeremiah, you can't have the gentleman saying fairer than that." Here the sharp little woman nudged her husband's arms. This was a hint for him to swallow his scruples and take the sovereign. Jeremiah agreed, and shortly the sovereign was in his pocket and he was leading George to a back upstairs room.

"We'd have put her in the best parlor," he said, "as I always like to make 'em comfortable. But

she'd have run away, so we was obliged to keep her in the room with the bars on the window."

"Poor Lola," thought George, as he conjured up the small stuffy room and the barred window.

But the room was not so comfortless as Jeremiah stated, thanks to Mrs Policeman. It was small, certainly, but it was neatly furnished as a bed-sitting-room. The window was certainly barred, but there was no other sign that it was a prison cell.

Before introducing George to this abode, it struck Jeremiah that the prisoner had been inquired for as "the young lady." He stopped Brendon at the door. "Might you know her name, sir?"

"Of course I know it," replied George, promptly. "Don't you?"

"Now I do," said Jeremiah, with a heavy nod, "but it was a rare time afore she'd speak. My missus got it out of her. Loler Veal it is, she says, and she's by way of being on the stage."

"She is the most celebrated dancer in London, and her name is Lola Velez," said George. "I don't suppose she'll be punished much for this. She's mad at times."

"Oh, if she's mad she'll get off lightly, but them parish register to be torn—it's bad work that. My father were a sexton," explained Jeremiah, soberly.

"And naturally you think Mademoiselle Velez has committed the most atrocious of crimes. But don't stand chattering here, my good fellow. I have to return by the nine train."

"I'll wait outside," said Jeremiah, on whom Brendon's generosity and peremptory manner had made an impression, "but you won't give her poison, or knives, or that, sir?"

George laughed. "No. She is the last person to use them if I did supply her with such articles."

"*She's a lively young woman,*" said the policeman,

and slowly unlocked the door. George was admitted, and then Jeremiah, so as to give the lovers—as he thought them—an opportunity of meeting unobserved, retired, locking the door after him. Lola and George were together.

She was seated by the window staring out into the darkness. On the table was a small lamp, and a fire burned in the grate. Lola started up when the door closed again. "Who is—who is?" she asked in her rapid way, and came toward him.

"Lola," began George, but he got no further. She ran forward and flung herself with tears at his feet, clutching his legs and wailing:

"Oh, my dear one, hast thou come in anger? Trample me, make me as earth, beloved, but be not enraged—ah, no—ah, no!"

"Lola. Get up and don't be a fool," said Brendon, speaking roughly to brace her nerves.

She rose, sobbing, and crept to a chair in a slinking manner, quite unlike her usual free grace. She did not raise her eyes, and George was pained to see the change. Badly as she had acted, he felt sorry at beholding her depressed, and like a sick beast in confinement.

"Lola," he said, taking a chair near her, "I have come as your friend."

"Not in anger—ah, but yes, in anger."

"I am not angry. I am very sorry."

"Ah, but in your eyes—they sparkle. I see Mees Vards. I do try to steal the church books. You are furiously enraged."

"Look at me and see."

But Lola would not, so George took her chin and made her gaze directly into his eyes. Lola's were filled with tears, but after a time she began to smile. "Ah, you are not enraged, it was for you I did it. I wish my dear George to myself—all—all."

"You know that is impossible."

"But it is not. I will have you."

"Not at all," said George, deliberately. "You will marry Bawdsey."

"That pig—cow, horrible and miserable. *Non. Ah, non!*" She sprang to her feet. "*Jamais. Au grand jamais!* I do swear," and producing a small black crucifix from her dress she kissed it vehemently,

She was a most impossible person to deal with, being as wild as a tigress and as impulsive as a child. George made her resume her seat, and drew his chair close to her. Much delighted, Lola took his hand within her own and looked at him affectionately. Brendon did not like the position at all, but it was necessary to humor Lola if he wished to arrive at the truth. He spoke to her very directly.

"Now, Lola, I wish you to tell me the truth."

"Ah, but I will. When you are kindness I tell you all."

"Do you know that you have done a wrong thing?"

"Pschutt," she said contemptuously. "I give that old mans knocks on the heads, but he is alive. Oh, yes, I did not kill him.

"I don't mean the assault, though that is bad enough. But your trying to destroy the register of the marriage."

"It is your fault," cried Lola, impetuously. "For loves of my George I did so. I wish you not to marry any but me."

"We can talk of that later, Lola. Answer me a few questions, and make no remarks."

"I will do what you say, my friend," said Lola, nodding. George thought for a moment. "How did you learn that Wargrove was the place where my parents were married?"

"I tell not that—indeed, I will not. It is my businesses."

"Mine also. You must tell."

"But I will not."

"For my sake, Lola."

"Ah, you want to know all, and then trick me. I will not tell."

"Then I will explain to you."

"Aha, you cannots—you know nothings at all. Pah! La, la, la, la."

George spoke sternly. "Lola, I know more than you give me credit for. I have seen the dagger."

This time he struck home, for she started. "What dagger?"

"The stiletto you left in Mrs Jersey's room."

"I did nothings. I was not there."

"Yes you were. For all I know you may have killed the woman."

"But it is foolish you talk, George. I did not. She was frightened—oh, very much afraid."

"So much that she gave you the confession you asked for?"

"Ah, yes—yes—yes," cried Lola, then seeing she had betrayed herself, she began to be alarmed. "Ah, you will say nothing. I would not tell anys but my George. He loves me. He will not see me dead."

"Good heavens, Lola, did you kill the woman?"

"That fat ladys in black silk? Ah, no, I did not. But she was so afraid of the knife."

"You left her alive on that night?"

"Why, yes, my George. We part—oh, such good friends." Lola blew a kiss from her finger-tips.

"She quite pleased, immense!"

"Well, Lola, as you have told so much, you must tell me all."

"There is nothing to say," she replied, turning sullen.



George rose. "Then I shall go away," he declared. "I came here to be your friend, Lola, and to save you from getting into further trouble. But if you will not be candid—" He moved to the door.

"What is candid? I know not, George." She sprang to her feet. "Ah, my heart, do not go. Soul of my soul, leave me not. I will do anythings what you ask of me."

"Then tell me the whole story of your visit to Mrs Jersey."

"But you will marry Mees Vard!"

"I do that in any case. See here, Lola," he added artfully, "this marriage register which you wish to destroy does not matter now. My grandfather has acknowledged me as his heir."

She looked at him with wide eyes and pale cheeks. "And you will be milor—you will marry Mees Vard—you will—you will—" Her mouth began to work piteously like a child being reproved.

"I will always be your friend, Lola!"

"You will marry Mees Vard?" she persisted.

"Lola," he took her hand, "if we married we would never be happy. I and you are different people. Do you wish to see me happy?"

"Ah, yes—if I die I would have you happy," she sobbed.

"Then allow me to marry Miss Ward, and give me up."

"Ah, but it is asking much—always too much."

"Well," said George, a trifle cruelly, "you offered to die for me just now, yet to see me happy you won't deny yourself anything."

"Yes—yes—but it is all so quick, my dear. Give times—oh, give times till I become used." She sobbed for a moment, then dried her eyes and sat down briskly. "I am ready, my George. You

shall be happy, but you must not forget poor Lola—ah, no!”

“Of course not,” replied George, patting her hand. “Now tell me the story. Wait. Was it you mother who told you of my father’s death?”

“Yes,” assented Lola. “She often talked of your fathers.”

“I heard she was in love with him,” said George, slowly.

Lola shrugged her shapely shoulders. “That I know not. My dear mother was handsome—oh, yes, and dark, and fond of gayness. She might have loved—eh—it is not impossibles.”

“Did she ever hint who killed my father?”

Lola shook her head. “No. Never did she say anythings. He was found dead—stabbed—” she made a gesture, “that was all—all!”

Evidently she could tell him nothing, so George reverted to more immediate matters. “How about that night? You knew that I was going to Mrs. Jersey’s on that night?”

“Ah, but yes. You did tell me.”

“Then what made you come also? Was it to see me?”

Lola put her finger in her mouth and looked down. “No, my George. I did want that confessions of the fat old lady, to stop you being milor, and then I thought you would marry only poor Lola.”

“How did you know about the confession?”

“That pig-man told me.”

“Bawdsey? Why did he tell you?”

“Pschutt!” said Lola, contemptuously. “Heloves me so, I can twist and twist him so,” she made a rapid motion with her fingers. “We did talk of the death of your fathers. I lamented that my poor mother did loves your fathers unhappily, as I did

love you. And I was enraged to think that your fathers had died. I did ask Bawdsey who made the stab—gave the death?—eh, it is, so I asked,” she added, nodding. “He could not say, but he declares that Mrs—what you call her—eh, but my friend, Mrs——”

“Mrs Jersey. Bawdsey declared that she knew?”

Lola nodded. “It was so,” she assented. “Mrs—what you call that fat ladys—she write out all she know,—of your father’s death and of his marriages. I say to myself that I would get that confession and learn where the marriage was made. Then I would burn the book that no one might learn. After I would say to you, that I could tell who killed your father if you made me madame your wife.”

“That’s a very pretty plot,” said Brendon, not knowing whether to be angry with her wrong-doing or touched by a love that to gain him would not hesitate to commit a crime. “So far you have carried it out. You have the confession——”

Lola put her hand on her breast. “He is here,” she said, nodding. “I carries him always—always!”

“Give it to me, Lola.”

Her eyes opened in wide alarm. “Ah, no, you will not ask me. I keep him to myself all.”

George saw that the moment was not propitious. But he was determined to get the confession before he left her. However, he begged her to continue her story. “How did you know the house?” he asked.

“It was the scarlet windows——”

“I remember. Bawdsey gave you that for guide.”

“Bah! He knew not I was going,” said Lola with a shrug. “I got out of him the fool-man all that I did want. I thought I would get to the fat ladys on the night you were with her, that I might have you for helps if she was enraged.”

"It seems to me that you protected yourself very well."

"With the daggers—oh, yes. I said to myself that if my George did not come for the fogs, that Mrs—what you say—Jarsey, oh, yes, would be enraged, and I would have trouble. I took the stiletto to save myself."

"How did you get into the house?"

"Wait, ah, wait! I did not dance all that night. I said I was ill and I came aways. I took the daggers and a cloak, and I went to the Square—it is not far from my houses—"

"No. You just turn the corner of the street," said Brendon. "Well?"

"I walked by the walls. It was after ten o'clocks. I walk round and round the Squares, and I then see a red lights. The door open—it was open, and many people came out of the houses: The fat lady was on the steps waving her hands—so—" Lola waved her hand. "A crowd was around. I came into the crowd, and when the fat lady was down shaking with the handshake, I did slip into the house."

"That was clever of you," said George, wondering at the dexterity with which Lola had managed to enter without exciting suspicion. "And then what did you do? Did you meet any one?"

"Ah, but no. I ran into a place; there was a room with a light, and that I did go into—"

"Mrs Jersey's sitting-room," murmured George. "Yes?"

"I was afraid to be thrown out, my dear, and I hid behind a curtain of the window. The fat lady she did come in and close the door. She talked to herself of Lord Derrington coming, and did seem enraged at him wishing to come—you understand?"

"Yes. What then?"

"A leetle boy did come in with wine and cakes. She did send him away, being angry, and did close the door. She took from a box——"

"A green box, Lola?"

"Yes, a green box—she did take a blue—what you, call—paper."

"A blue envelope?"

"Ah, yes, it is so, and she looked at a paper—a white paper she took from the envelope. She laughed, and said that milor would love to have this. I say to myself behind the curtains: It is the confessions, I will have it. Then she did put it in the envelopes and leave it on the tables. It was near me. I could steal——"

"And you did!" said George, impatitntly.

"But no, my George. I did try, and madame she saw my arm. With a cry she leap to the doors. I come out and say that I wish to talk of the deaths of Monsieur Vanes. She turns most white, and did not cry no more. Then she ask me what I want——"

"You needn't tell all in detail, Lola. Be as short as possible."

"Oh, well—but yes, assuredly. I told madame I was of San Remo, and did talk of my dear mother, and of her love for Monsieur Vane. But this pig-womans insult my mother. I become enraged, I bring my dagger and wave it so——" again Lola made a dramatic gesture. "I say that I kill her. She fall on her knees and hide her face. Then I did take the confessions out of the blue envelopes and hide it——"

"That was very clever of you, Lola. Did Mrs Jersey see?"

"Ah, but no she did not. I take it when she was with the eyes covered. Then having all what I was *desired*, and seeing her so afraid, I had the contempt

look you. I say, 'There, there,' and I throw the dagger at her feet. Then I go to the door and say I would depart. She beg me to stop. I did stop, and we talk of San Remo, and of my mother. I say that you were my love, and that Monsieur Vane was the father of you—"

"Then she knew who I was on that night?"

"Ah, yes, but she did. I say you wish to see her the next day. She say, 'I will tell him nothing, and now go, for I have to see a great gentlemans.' I was quite happy."

"Did she not miss the confession?"

"No! I said nothing of wanting that. It was in my pocket. The blue envelope was on the table. She never thought but what it was within. Then she ask me to say nothing to any one about San Remo, and we part quite happy. She allowed me out of the door, and closed it again, oh, so softly. I saw her no more."

"You left the dagger behind?"

"It was on the floors where I threw it. I wished to get away with the confessions, lest she should call me thieves. I did not wait for to take the dagger. I departed. That is all."

"Humph!" said George. The story seemed likely enough. After letting Lola out of the house, Mrs. Jersey then came to see if he and Train were in bed. Expecting Lord Derrington, and knowing from Lola who he was, she no doubt expected George to interrupt the interview. But finding him—as she thought in bed—she departed satisfied. Then she met Margery, and after locking her in her room, went down to meet her death. It was eleven when all this happened, and Bawdsey in the coat of Lord Derrington arrived close upon twelve. Therefore, as Lola left Mrs Jersey alive and Bawdsey found her dead, she must have been killed in the interval.

and whomsoever had done this had used the dagger left by Lola.

However, George had learned all he wished to know in the mean time, and it only remained to get the confession from Lola. She refused to give it up. George entreated, cajoled, stormed, insisted, she still held out. "No, I will not, I will not," she kept saying.

Finally he hit on a solution of the difficulty. "If you do not give it to me it will be taken from you when you go to prison."

"Ah, but will it?" cried Lola, wide-eyed with alarm.

"Certainly, and will probably be published in the papers. Keep it if you like, Lola, but don't blame me if you get into trouble over it. I assure you if you keep it they will take it."

Lola pulled a white packet from her breast, and ran with it to the fire. "They will not have it. I burn—I burn," and she threw the papers on the fire. George shot past her, snatched them out before they could catch alight, and thrust them into his pocket. Lola turned on him like a tigress, and he thought she would strike him. She seemed inclined to do so. Then unexpectedly she threw up her arms and fell into a chair weeping. "It is the end—you love me no more—we part—we part. The confessions will part us, all—all, alas!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE CONFESSION OF A JEALOUS WOMAN

**G**EORGE returned to town with the confession of Mrs Jersey in his pocket. On arriving at the Liverpool Street Station he wrote a note to Kowlaski telling him of Lola's plight, and advising him to engage counsel for her defense. He added that he would come around the next day to see Kowlaski and discuss what could be done toward extricating Lola from the mess she had involved herself in. Having thus done what he could, Brendon took the underground railway to Kensington, and alighted at the High Street Station. In another half-hour he was in his rooms.

After making a good meal, for he felt the need of food to sustain him, he ordered coffee, and sat down to read the manuscript of Mrs Jersey. The coffee was brought, George lighted his pipe, and having poked the fire into a blaze, made himself comfortable.

The confession of the wretched woman who had come to so tragic an end, was written on several sheets of foolscap loosely pinned together. Her caligraphy was vile, and George had great difficulty in making out some of the words. Also the English was not faultless, but good grammar and fine writing were scarcely to be expected from a woman in the position of Eliza Stokes.

But she wrote in a most cold-blooded way, and seemingly exulting in her wickedness. All through her confession ran a venomous strain of deadly hatred toward George's mother, and indeed against any



woman who paid attention to Vane. Jenny Howard was not spared, and the woman Velez, "who kept an oil-shop," sneered Mrs Jersey, was mentioned. When Brendon discovered that Mrs Jersey had Italian blood in her veins he saw perfectly well whence she got her savage nature and undisciplined affections. She was like a wild beast let loose among more civilized animals, and the wonder was that with such a nature she had not committed more crimes than those she confessed to. The woman was a dangerous creature, and Brendon when he laid down the manuscript thought it just as well that she had been removed even by the violent means which Providence permitted.

"My parents were of humble station," began Mrs Jersey, abruptly. "I believe my mother was a lady's maid. She married my supposed father, who was a butler. I say 'my supposed father' as I have reason to believe that I was the daughter of a certain Italian count who had loved and betrayed my mother. In her moments of rage my mother would taunt my supposed father with this, but when calm she always denied that there was any truth. When I grew old enough to understand she rebuked me for asking about the matter. 'You are my daughter,' she said abruptly, 'and the daughter of Samuel Stokes, who is the biggest fool and the greatest craven I know.'

"It will be seen that there was no love lost between my parents. My father Stokes—as I may call him, though I believe the count was my real sire—was always very kind to me, and shielded me from my mother's rage. She treated me very cruelly, and when fifteen I was glad to go out as a scullery-maid so as to escape her persecution. Shortly after *I took up life on my own account she died in a fit of violent rage, during which she broke a blood-*

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vessel. I think Stokes was glad when she died. She made his life a misery when she lived, and tormented every one around her. If I have faults, it is not to be expected that I could inherit a decent nature from such a mother. I never loved her, and when she died I did not shed a single tear. I remember singing at my work on the day I received the news. One of my fellow-servants asked me why I was so gay? I replied that I had heard of my mother's death. After that they hated me, and I had to leave my situation. But had any one of them possessed such a mother, any one of them would have been as gay and relieved as I was. So much for my mother.

“As for my presumed father Stokes, I saw very little of him. He retired from business and bought a public-house. Then he married again, and was not inclined to see much of me. I did not mind, as I never loved him in spite of his kindness. I dare say I should have returned his affection, but my mother had beaten all love out of me.

“It is needless to give my early life in detail. I rose from scullery-maid to housemaid. Then I became parlor-maid in a suburban villa, where the wages were poor and the food was bad. I took charge of children when not doing housework, and managed to get on. But I was ambitious. I wished to get among the servants of the aristocracy. A friend of mine who was maid to the Duchess of — taught me her duties, and I procured a situation. I pleased my mistress, and she promised to do much for me. However, she died, and I was thrown on the world. I saw an advertisement for a lady's maid, and got the situation. It was in this way that I became the servant of that woman whom I hated so deeply.

“She was called Rosina Lockwood, and was no

better born than myself. Her father was a low man who taught singing, and she appeared herself on the stage. I never thought she was beautiful, myself. She had good hair, and her complexion was passable, but her figure was bad, and she had no brains. An inane, silly, foolish woman. How Percy Vane could have eloped with her beats me. But men are such fools. He would not look at me, yet I was ten times as lovely as this singing-woman, and quite as well born. Oh, how I hated her!

“At first I rather liked Miss Lockwood. She was kind to me in her silly way, and the gentlemen who were in love with her gave me plenty of money to deliver notes and other things. There was one gentleman who was the best of them all—and the biggest fool over her blue eyes and fair hair. His name was Ireland, and he had plenty of money. He came to learn singing from old Lockwood simply to be near her, and proposed three times, to my knowledge. But she would have nothing to do with him, which was foolish, as he had money, and she could have twisted him round her finger. Why he loved her so and what he saw in her I can't say. She had nothing attractive about her, so far as I could see.

“I was a handsome girl in those days, though I say it myself. But if a woman is good-looking, why shouldn't she say so? I had a perfect figure, and a complexion like cream and roses. My hair was as black as night, and my eyes were sparkling and large. I taught myself to read and write, and I learned French. Also I learned to play the piano, and to conduct myself like a lady, as I always was. I often dreamed that I would marry a gentleman, and I could have done so but that my foolish heart was captured by the only man who would have *nothing* to do with it, or with me.

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"I never loved till I set eyes on him. There was a footman who wanted to marry me; to join our savings and set up in a public-house. But I told him I was born for better things. Then a coachman asked me to be his wife, but I hated a man who had to do with horses. Oh, I had plenty of offers, as a handsome girl should. But I knew my own value, and looked about for the gentleman who would give me my rightful position as a lady. From my Italian father I inherited aristocratic tastes, and I was not going to remain a low, vulgar common servant all my life, not me.

"Then he came to the house. Oh, my adored one, my idol, my angel, how magnificent and beautiful thou wast. Percy was his dear name, and his blood was very blue. Lord Derrington was his father, a most aristocratic nobleman, who was an old brute, from my experience of him. But he was of high rank I don't deny, and Percy had the blood of heroes in his veins. He came to take lessons in singing. But after a time I saw that he was in love with my mistress. Afterward I found out that he had seen her at a concert and had fallen in love with her. I don't believe it. Who could have loved that bad figure and that silly brain? Now a woman like myself—but he never cared for me, although I adored him from the first time I set eyes on his manly form. It was her arts that captured him, else he would have turned from her to me. But he never did.

"How handsome and fascinating was my hero Percy Vane. Fair hair and blue eyes, and the figure of a Life-Guardsman—just the kind of man I liked. He was kind to me—for her sake, I suppose—and gave me money and presents. She said she loved him, and used to make me sick with talking of him. I let her think I was her dear friend, as if

she had known my true feelings she would have sent me away, and then I would never have seen my hero again. I made the best of my position, for at least I saw him as often as she did, and that was something. They both looked on me as their friend. Had they only known how I hated her, and loved him!

“Lord Derrington was angry with Percy for loving my mistress, and I don’t wonder at it, a low singing-woman. Percy had some money of his own, inherited from his mother, and he proposed an elopement. He said that Lord Derrington could not leave the estates away from him, and that some day he would come in for the title. She never lived to be Lady Derrington. I was glad of that. I should have killed her had she reached that pitch of splendor. Her position should have been mine. But it never was.

“Well, they eloped. After singing at a concert in St. James’s Hall, he met her outside, and took her to Liverpool Street Station. I was waiting there with the luggage. We went down to a place called Wargrove, in Essex, and the very next day they were married in the church of that parish. I was furious, but what could I do? Had I told Lord Derrington, he might have stopped the marriage, but Percy would never have forgiven me, and I did not wish to lose sight of him. As Mrs. Vane’s maid, I had chances of seeing him daily, and of basking in the light of his eyes. It was weak of me, but I loved him so dearly that I would have done anything simply to be in his presence. But I wish now that I had prevented the marriage. Since I could not get him, I didn’t see why she should bear off the prize. But I was a girl then, and sentimental and foolish. And she was a cat, as she always was.

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“Afterward we went to Paris, and from that place Percy wrote to tell his grandfather that he was married. I know he did not mention the place, for the letter was given to me to post, and I opened it. I never gave it a thought at the moment, but afterward Percy’s mistake in not telling where the marriage had taken place did me a lot of good. I should not now be writing in this house, but for that lucky omission. Lord Derrington would have nothing to do with his son, and there was trouble with Mr Lockwood.

“But I don’t think they minded much. Percy was wrapped up in the creature, and she loved him in her silly simpering way. I pretended to be quite happy, but I inwardly was raging all the time. For his sake I put up with the unpleasant position, and I never received my reward, never, never, never. Oh, how some women’s hearts are broken by the cruelty and neglect of men.

“I lived with the two of them during their married life. A son was born, and she died. I was glad when she died, and I was sorry she left the boy. Percy was wrapped up in the child, and gave him to me to nurse. Mrs Vane was buried in Père la Chaise, and then Percy, with myself and the baby, went to Monte Carlo. He gambled there in order to forget his grief—though I don’t see what he had to moan over, seeing what a silly fool his late wife was. Percy lost money, and wrote to his father, who declined to help him. Then he went to Italy and wandered about. Now that he was free I hoped to marry him. When not nursing that horrid child—he was called George after his maternal grandfather, and was a scrubby little beast. Some said he was a fine child. I could not see it, myself. He was her child, and that was enough to make me hate him as I did. But as I say, when not nursing

him, I devoted myself to study so as to be worthy of the time when Percy would marry me. I knew that the future Lady Derrington would hold a high rank, and I qualified myself to fill the position gracefully. I did work. I learned arithmetic, and could write beautifully. I talked Italian and French like a native. I got an old artist to teach me to paint in water-colors, and I bought a book which taught the manners of good society. Also I tried to dress well, and do my hair becomingly. Percy saw the change in me, and congratulated me on the improvement which had taken place in me since leaving England. Had he only known that it was for his sake I had improved!

“As to that child, I should have liked to drown it, or to have given it to gypsies. As Lady Derrington, I did not wish to be troubled with her brat. Besides, Percy loved the boy so, that he used to make me envious the way he nursed him. But had I got rid of the child—and I thought of a thousand safe ways I could have done so—I should only have been sent away, and then some woman would have got hold of him. I thought it best to bear with my aching pain and put up with the child so that I might be near to watch over Percy.

“The end of it came in Milan. We were stopping at the Hôtel de Ville, and there was a waiter who fell in love with me. He was an English boy, called George Rates—a horrid, scrubby, red-haired, nasty, pale-faced creature, who worried me to death. Besides, he was younger than I was, and I wished for a husband to protect me. I should have had to look after George Rates, whereas Percy, in the days to come, would look after me. Besides, I felt that it was an impertinence for a low waiter to expect me to marry him—me, who had done so much to

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improve myself, and who looked forward to taking proud rank among the British aristocracy.

“At first I laughed at him, but he became such a nuisance that I told him plainly that I would have nothing to do with him. He then accused me of being in love with my master. I acknowledged it proudly. Why should I not? A woman should glory in her love. I did! I told George Rates that I worshiped the very ground Percy walked on; I gave my passionate feelings full vent, and bore him to the ground under the storm of my indignation. He told the other servants, and they insulted me, especially the English ones, as there were two or three in the hotel. I was persecuted, but I bore all for his dear sake. Then it came to his ears. Percy heard what I had said to George Rates. He called me in: he accused me of making him ridiculous, of being out of my mind, of a thousand and one cruel things. I lost my head. I told him how I loved him. I knelt at his feet. I implored that he would reward my love—my long, long sufferings. He laughed in my tearful face. At that moment I hated him, but not for long. My life was bound up in his. When he dismissed me, I thought that my heart was broken.

“I was dismissed. He procured a new nurse from England—a Scotch hussy, as ugly as she was silly. I saw her often in Milan after my dismissal. Oh, that time—oh, those weary days! I wept. I prayed. I moaned. I was a wreck. With what money I had I went to a convent near Milan, and stopped there for a month. But I could not remain away from him. I came out. He was gone. I went to inquire at the hotel. He had gone to Rome. Afterward a message came that all letters were to be sent to San Remo. I determined to go to San Remo, and to be near him. I would have died else. George



Rates, who was still in love with me, proved a willing tool. I could not get to San Remo without money. He offered to advance me the railway fare, and he got me a situation in the Hôtel d'Angleterre as housemaid. He also was going there for the season as a waiter. I said that if he took me to San Remo I would marry him. He did so, and I—but that comes later. Sufficient it is to say that George believed in my promise, and that I found myself again in the presence—the heavenly presence—of my adored Percy.

“But I had only come to submit myself to fresh anguish. He saw me, but took no notice of me. I was afraid to follow him too closely lest he should ask the police to interfere. George Rates was jealous, too, and I had to consider him, as, failing Percy rewarding my love, I could fall back on George. He was always useful to supply the money for me to get back to England, where I was certain of a situation. I handled the situation in a masterly manner, and contrived to see Percy without his seeing me, and without exciting too openly the jealousy of George Rates.

“But it was the horrid girl that caused me pain. She was one of the daughters of General Howard, whom Percy had met at Como. The two girls both laid themselves out to catch my darling. But their arts did not succeed at Como. Jenny was the one who tried hardest to get him, but Violet took her chance also. When they came to San Remo they stopped at the Hotel d'Angleterre. I looked after their room, and, knowing what they were, I made myself their friend. They knew me as the former nurse of Percy's horrid little son, and wondered how I came to be a housemaid. I told some story *which* satisfied them. I forget what it was. They *believed* in me thoroughly, and they found out that

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I loved Percy. Then they were amused, and I hated them for it. They told Percy that I was watching him, and he came to the hotel no more. But I still pretended to be their friend, for my own ends. There was a masked ball coming off, and the Miss Howards wished to go unbeknown to their father. I entered into the spirit of the joke. I procured them two blue dominoes and each a sprig of yellow holly, so that they might know one another. They went to the ball thus disguised.

“I went also—in the same dress. I had got a third blue domino and I also wore a sprig of holly. In my pocket I took a stiletto. Why did I do that? Because I was determined to kill any one who tried to make love to my Percy. I knew that Jenny Howard, the little cat, would try and get him to love her, and I would have killed her with pleasure had she become Percy’s bride. As I was masked, I had no fear of being discovered should I stab any one, and, moreover, were there trouble, the Miss Howards, being dressed as I was, even to the sprig of yellow holly, might be accused of any crime that might happen. Moreover, even if I killed Jenny I knew that the two sisters quarreled, and that on the evidence of the holly and the domino Violet might be charged with the crime. Oh, I made myself quite safe! I am a clever woman.

“About the stiletto. I received that from a low shopkeeper called Velez, who was in love with Percy. She and her husband kept an oil-shop, and her husband was very jealous of her. She was madly in love with Percy, as I found out when buying something at her shop, and I got to know her intimately, so that I could make use of her if the occasion arose. I did make use of her, by getting the stiletto, and I took it to the ball.

“I heard Percy propose to marry Jenny, and I

later, when I was at the hospital, he brought a  
small amount of money to me and I took the money  
and went to the hospital and I stayed there for  
some days and then I went to the Hotel d'Angleterre  
and I stayed there for some days and then I went  
to the hospital and I stayed there for the  
whole of my life. I was that I had to go to  
the hospital and I stayed there. He told me, and  
I told him, that some later on I had to go to say that  
George had done his promise, and that I found  
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ing me, and he avoided exciting too openly the jealousy  
of George.

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She was one of the daughters of General Howard.  
She lived in England and I did not meet her at Como. The two girls both  
wanted to go out to see my darling. But their  
parents would not let them. Jenny was the one  
who was the most earnest about it, but Violet took  
the most interest. When we came to San Remo  
I saw them at the Hotel d'Angleterre. I looked  
at them and I was wondering what they were. I  
knew they were the daughters of General Howard.  
They knew me as the father of the little boy  
and wondered who I was. I told them my story  
and they found out that I was the father of the little boy.

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heard Percy propose to marry Jenny, and I

was minded then to kill her. I drew the stiletto from my breast, and would have rushed forward, hoping to escape in the confusion when I killed her. But my heart failed me; even when she was left alone my heart failed me. Jenny took off her mask, and I left her sitting waiting for Percy's return. Then I followed Percy and saw Violet join him. I knew it was Violet, owing to the unmasking of Jenny, and, moreover, I had seen Violet listening, as I was. She loved him also—the cat! However, I saw that she wanted to get Percy out of the place by making him think she was Jenny. She did. I followed. He took her home to the gates of the hotel and left her there. When he was coming back to the ball I stopped him at the bottom of the parade. There was no one in sight, it was late, and a clear moon was shining.

“Percy thought I was Violet, whom he mistook for her sister. He addressed me in such endearing tones as Jenny, and remonstrated so gently about what he called the rashness of following him from the hotel, that I lost my temper. I snatched off the mask and poured out my wrath. Percy burst out laughing when he recognized me. He said—never mind what he said—but it was an insult, and my Italian blood boiled in my veins. I drew the stiletto and rushed on him. At that moment my hand was caught from behind, and I fell. It was that man Ireland, who was then at San Remo, and a great friend of Percy's. He had wrenched the stiletto out of my hand. For a moment no one said anything, and I arose to my feet. Ireland addressed me as Miss Howard—Miss Violet Howard. Percy laughed again and corrected his mistake, saying that I was a love-sick nursemaid whom he had discharged. Then I lost my temper.

“Stop! I must say exactly how it happened.

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Percy was leaning against the parapet of the parade in a careless attitude. He did not even move when I rushed on him with the stiletto, and had Ireland not caught my arm, I should have killed him. Ireland said that he had followed me—thinking I was Violet Howard—to ask me to return to the hotel. He talked some rubbish about a gentle-born English girl being out at night; but when he found that I was only a servant there was no more of that talk. Poor Eliza Stokes could have been out till dawn for all these gentlemen cared. They laughed at me, Percy leaning against the parapet, Ireland beside me, holding the stiletto carelessly in his hand. As I said, I lost my temper, and I told Percy what I thought of that fool Rosina Lockwood. He lost his temper also, but that only made me more angry. At last he dashed forward, and I believe he would have struck me but that Mr Ireland intervened. I don't know exactly how it happened, but, in moving, Mr Ireland evidently forgot how he held the stiletto, and put out his hand with the weapon pointing outward. In rushing on me, Percy came against it, and it ran right into his heart. With a choking cry he fell dead. I was terrified, and began to wring my hands. Ireland knelt down and found that Percy was dead. He seized my wrist and told me to hold my tongue lest I should be accused of the death. I said it was his fault. He replied it was an accident. But I had got the stiletto, I had tried to kill Percy, and Ireland declared that if I said anything that he would denounce me as the criminal. I was terrified as I saw the danger in which I was placed. Ireland suggested that we should throw the body over the parapet on to the beach, and that it would be thought robbers had killed Percy. I agreed, and we threw the body of my darling over. Oh, how my

heart ached when I heard it fall on the **cruel, cruel** stones.

“With Ireland I arranged to hold my tongue, and on his part he promised he would say nothing. The next day the news of the discovery of the body came. I was nearly out of my mind. Señora Velez, from whom I had borrowed the stiletto, knowing of my love for Percy, and being in love with him herself, accused me of the crime. I denied it, and said that if she did not hold her tongue I would tell her husband how she had loved Percy. She was afraid of her husband, who was a jealous brute, so she remained quiet. I gave her back the stiletto, which I had obtained from Ireland. We were both safe, but I was so ill that I left the hotel and returned to England. George Rates, who never suspected my share in the death, followed—”

It was at this point that George ceased reading. He now knew the worst. His father had died by accident, and Ireland had been the unwitting cause of his death. Brendon wondered how the old man could have carried the knowledge all these years without speaking. He determined to have an interview with him. But at last he knew the truth about the death in San Remo. It inculpated no one, and he could not see how—according to Bawdsey—it could be connected with the murder of Mrs Jersey.

## CHAPTER XXII

### WHO BAWDSEY WAS

**G**EORGE read the remainder of Mrs Jersey's confession and then put it away. Even when he got to the end he could not connect the San Remo crime with that of Amelia Square. It was in his mind to see his grandfather and tell the story to him, backed by the production of the confession. But on second thought he decided to see Bawdsey first. He wired for an appointment, and received a reply stating that Bawdsey was going out of town at three o'clock that day, but would be in his rooms till then. George lost no time. He called a cab, and within an hour of receiving the answer to his request he was on his way to Bloomsbury.

On arriving he found that the detective expected him, and went to his room. Bawdsey was still in a disturbed state, as he was most anxious to get down the country and to help Lola out of her difficulty. He received Brendon irritably and in silence. George saw that the man was all nerves, and did not resent his sharp greeting. He sat down and opened the conversation.

"You are going down to see Lola?" he asked.

"Of course. I am much worried over her. She may get into serious trouble over this freak."

"Well, why not tell the judge she is insane at times? Then she will get off lightly."

"Would that be true?" asked the detective, struck by the idea.



"As true as most things. She really is not accountable for her actions when she gets into these frenzies, and in such a one she must have been to attempt the burglary."

"Poor soul, I wonder how she is now?"

"Oh, she is not troubled much. Her spirits are as good as usual. She hardly seems to realize the enormity of her offense."

"How do you know?" asked Bawdsey with a stare.

"Because I saw her last night."

"You saw her?"

"I did. After I left you I took the train to War-grove and had an interview with her."

"You might have told me, Mr Brendon," said Bawdsey, in a wounded tone.

"Where would have been the use of that? I can manage my own business, I hope."

"Considering how I love her, it is my business also."

George shrugged his shoulders. "Well, you see, Bawdsey, it was your intention to see Lola first. I guessed as much, so I stole a march on you."

Bawdsey fenced. "I don't see how you can say that."

"I can. You know that Lola was in this house on the night the woman died."

"I presume so, since she got the confession, and she must have secured it to know where your parents were married."

"Well, then, knowing that, you wished to get that confession."

"Yes, I did," said the detective, "and why not? I desired to know if Mrs Jersey said anything about the San Remo crime in it."

"I can tell you that. She did. I have the confession."

Bawdsey bounded from his chair. "Where is it?" he asked.

"In my rooms, locked away."

"I do call that a shame," grumbled Bawdsey. "You might have trusted me, Mr Brendon?"

"Might I? Would you have trusted me?"

"I do; you know I do."

"To such an extent as suits yourself. But would you have shown me that confession had it come into your possession?"

"You are not showing it to me," said Bawdsey, evasively.

"That is not an answer. But I'll show you the confession whenever you like. Come, now, would you have shown it to me?"

"Since you have read it, why ask me that question?" snapped the detective. "You know—"

"Yes, I know that you would have burnt the confession. I know that to have a paper in existence which sets forth that Mr Bawdsey's true name is George Rates is not to your liking."

"I never did anything to disgrace that name, Mr Brendon."

"That is between yourself and your conscience," replied George, coolly, "and has nothing to do with me. You are George Rates?"

Bawdsey shrugged his shoulders. "There is no use denying it," he said; "you have my wife's handwriting."

"Was Mrs Jersey really your wife?"

"She was. We married soon after we left San Remo. She was hard up or she would not have married me."

"And you went to the States?"

"We did. There I took the name of Jersey, and tried a variety of things, none of which came to any good. Then I left Eliza."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because she was a devil," said Bawdsey, his face lighting up. "I tried all the means in my power to make her happy, but she was always quarreling and nagging, and lamenting that she had not married that Vane—your father, Mr Brendon."

"Did she tell you about the murder?"

"It wasn't a murder," protested Bawdsey. "No, she did not tell me, but from a hint or two she dropped about getting money from Mr Ireland I guessed that he had something to do with it. I came across to England and I saw him. He told me the whole story."

"Did you get money from him?"

"I did not. I am an honest man, although you do not seem to think so. I left all that blackmailing to my wife. She came over to get money out of Ireland. He simply said that he would tell the whole truth and would call the woman Velez as a witness about the dagger."

"But that woman is dead?"

"Oh, no, she isn't," said Bawdsey, coolly. "Lola told me that she was alive and still in San Remo. She could have made things very hot for my wife. But failing Ireland, my wife—Mrs Jersey we will call her—had another string to her bow. She heard how Lord Derrington denied the marriage, and how you were living with your grandfather Lockwood. She went to Derrington and——"

"I know the rest. And you came to live in this house."

"Not at the time. I went back to the States, but as I could do nothing there I returned to England. Then I took up the private-inquiry business and called myself Bawdsey. I came to see my wife. She would not let me call myself her husband, and, as I had no great liking for her, I agreed. I was

in this house for a few weeks and then I got my own diggings. I saw as little of Mrs Jersey as was possible."

"Why was that?"

"Well, sir," replied Bawdsey, frankly, "I didn't hold with the annuity she was getting."

"In a word, you disapproved of the blackmail?"

"That's a good, useful word, sir," said Bawdsey, easily. "Yes, I did. I never would take a penny from her, and when I lived here during the few weeks I paid my board. Yes, sir, I'm an honest man."

George stretched out his hand and shook that of Bawdsey heartily. "I am convinced you are, Bawdsey, and I apologize for my suspicions. But in some ways—eh?"

"I didn't act very straight, you mean. Well, sir, when one deals with a criminal case one can't be too careful. I have had to tell lies, sir. And I say, Mr Brendon," cried the detective, with a burst of confidence, "I would not have shown you that agreement. I guessed that Eliza would state who I was, and I didn't wish you to think that I was connected with her."

"Why not?"

"Well, sir, I fancied, seeing what you know, that you might suspect me of killing her."

"No, Bawdsey. As you have acted so fairly all through, I am convinced that you are innocent on that score. But why did you say that the San Remo crime was connected with the death of Mrs Jersey?"

Bawdsey opened his eyes. "Can't you see, sir? The stiletto."

"Oh, you mean that the weapon used by Lola was the same one as my father was killed with?"

"Certainly, Mr Brendon. It belonged to Señora Velez, the mother. She gave it to Lola, for I saw

it in her rooms, before the death of Mrs Jersey, and I recognized it from the description given by my wife."

"But there are dozens of stilettoes like that one. Lord Derrington showed it to me."

"Yes, that's true enough. But you see, from what my wife told me, I knew that she had got the dagger from the woman Velez. It wasn't hard to see, when I dropped across a similar weapon in the room of a woman also called Velez, that it was the same. Now you see how it is that Lola knew so much about the death of your father, and how she and I came to talk of the matter."

"How did you drop on the subject in the first place?"

"The name was enough for me. I saw Lola, and I fell in love with her, as you know. Then I remembered the name Velez and got an introduction to her. One thing led to another until I knew the whole story, and she admitted that the stiletto was the one with which Mr Vane had been killed."

George thought for a few minutes. "Tell me, Bawdsey," he said at length, "did you suspect Lola of committing the crime?"

"Yes, I did," admitted Bawdsey, frankly; "you see she has a devil of a temper. I never knew that she had gone to see Mrs Jersey on that night, although I might have guessed it because of the way she tried to learn the whereabouts of the house."

"You mean the crimson light? Her excuse was foolish I thought the other day when you stated it," said George. "But when did you first suspect her?"

"When I picked up the stiletto. I recognized it at once. It was my intention to take it round to her, so that she should not be incriminated, but I was so upset—as I said the other day—that I forgot all about the matter. When I did think, it

was too late, for Derrington woke up and put on his coat. I wondered whether he would mention the stiletto to me. But he never did."

"Because he knew nothing about it," said George. "Mrs Ward stole it, as I told you."

"Oh, I see how it is now. But I really did suspect Lola. I asked her if she was in the house. She said that she had been, although she denied it at first."

"That's Lola's way," said George; "she always begins by denial. How did you bring her to confess?"

"I threatened to identify the stiletto. Then she told the truth—if it was the truth," said Bawdsey, doubtfully.

"Oh, I think so. I don't believe she killed the woman."

"But you know her temper?"

"Yes, I do, but since she has got what she wanted—the confession—there was no sense in her committing a murder. No, I quite believe that she threw the dagger at Mrs Jersey's feet, as she said. It is just like one of Lola's impulsive actions."

Bawdsey scratched his head. "I wonder who did kill Eliza," he muttered, "if Lola is innocent and I am innocent?" He looked at Brendon.

"I can't help you," replied George, rising; "the thing is quite beyond me. It must have been some one in the house."

"No," replied Bawdsey, positively; "remember, Mr Train heard a door close—the front door—some time about half-past eleven."

"That was you, was it not?"

"No, sir. I did not arrive till close on twelve, and Mrs Jersey was already dead. The door must have been opened and closed by the murderer, and he left just before I arrived."

"But how could he have entered? You alone had

the latch-key. As to Lola, she slipped in while Mrs Jersey was dismissing her guests."

Bawdsey shook his head. "I can't understand it, sir. Of course there was another gentleman who had the house for a short time." He looked meaningly at Brendon.

George looked puzzled. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, sir," began Bawdsey, with his invariable formula, "I don't like to mention names, and I am sure what I say will go no further, but there is Mr Ireland——"

Brendon started to his feet with an agitated face. "Ireland! Oh, no, that is impossible," he declared, "quite impossible! Why should he have a latch-key?"

"After your grandfather's death he was in possession of the house for a time, and the keys would be with him. In handing them to Lord Derrington's agent he might have forgotten one."

"It's improbable!"

"I don't think so. It was a chance, I think, at first, but when he knew that Mrs Jersey occupied the house he might have found the latch-key useful to see her when he felt inclined. I dare say she tried to get money out of him again."

"But he refused her."

"He did—once," said Bawdsey, meaningly, "but Mr Ireland was not so young as he had been, and dreaded lest his—accident should be known."

"It was an accident," said George. "Much as I deplore the death of my father, yet I acquit Ireland of all blame. But he didn't know she lived here until Miss Bull told him."

"Oh, yes, he did. I'm sure Mrs Jersey would let him know that she was just round the corner. She always kept in touch with useful friends."

"But why should he kill her so suddenly?"

"Well, he might have heard that she had written out a confession, or even about Lord Derrington's visit. And then he would come round to ask her if she had incriminated him in her confession. He would ask her for a sight of it. Not having it, for she found the blue envelope empty after Lola left, she would deny that she had it. The stiletto left by Lola would be on the table. What was more natural than for Ireland to pick it up and kill her in a sudden access of dread? Remember, Mrs Jersey could accuse him of the crime, as it was known that Ireland was jealous of your mother's marriage to Vane. Oh, there was plenty of motive. As to his having refused her before, he was getting old, and thinking he might be brought to justice by her confession, for he never knew when she would die or into whose hands it would fall, he might have lost his nerve."

"It strikes me that if he struck the blow he had a great deal of nerve," said George, dryly; "but you go on a lot of suppositions. You suppose that Ireland retained a latch-key of this house, that he knew Mrs Jersey had written out a confession, that he knew my grandfather was coming on that night—in fact, that's all theory, Bawdsey. I do not believe Mr Ireland had anything to do with the matter."

"Then who had?" asked the detective.

"What would you say to Margery?"

"What, the niece—that half-witted girl?"

"Exactly. Half-witted. She is more like an animal than anything human. She gets these sudden fits of rage. When Miss Bull fainted Margery rushed in and threatened me with her fists. Seeing what an uncontrollable temper she had, it occurred to me that she might have killed her aunt."



"But Miss Bull says that the aunt locked the girl in her room."

"Of course, but Miss Bull may know the truth, and may be shielding Margery—she seems to have a strange affection for the girl. What if Mrs Jersey—to vary the story—found Margery down the stairs after Lola was gone, and instead of rebuking her as Miss Bull said in the passage——"

"At eleven o'clock, mind."

"Later, I think," said George, quickly. "You did not arrive till nearly twelve, and the woman was just dead."

"I don't think a few minutes would make much difference," said Bawdsey, quietly, "but go on, sir. Let me hear your theory."

"Well, I fancy that Mrs Jersey caught Margery down the stairs, and took her into her own room to rebuke her quietly, so that the rest of the house might not hear. Also she would be anxious to learn if the girl had overheard her conversation with Lola. If Margery had, she would assuredly have told Miss Bull. Mrs Jersey would be afraid of that, and I dare say she stormed at Margery to make her speak."

"But there could have been no row, sir. No one heard a disturbance."

"Oh, the boarders are old and sleep lightly. But I am bound to say I did not hear a disturbance myself," said George, reflectively. "Mrs Jersey may have argued quietly. Then, as you say, the stiletto was on the table. Margery, goaded into action, might, with the sudden rage of a dumb animal, might have——"

"Well, it's not impossible. But about the door closing?"

"When Margery saw what she had done," pursued George, still trying to guess what had taken place,

“her first impulse would be to run away. She would steal out and open the door. I am pretty sure Miss Bull was on the watch and saw her. She would draw the girl back and close the door—at half-past eleven, as Train heard. Then she would pacify Margery and lock her in her bedroom, after previously instructing her what to say next morning. That is what I believe, Bawdsey.”

“It’s a very pretty case,” murmured the detective, “and things might have happened as you say. But if it is the case, there is not much chance of learning the truth. Both Margery and Miss Bull will be silent. And after all, my theory regarding Ireland is just as good, Mr Brendon.”

George rose to go. “Stick to your theory and I’ll stick to mine,” he said, smiling. “But what about Lola?”

“Well, sir, I’ll go down with Kowlaski and see her. We will do whatever we can to get her out of her trouble. And you, sir——”

“Oh, I shall have nothing more to do with Lola. Take her away to the States as your wife, Bawdsey, and I will get my grandfather to give you the thousand pounds to start life on.”

“It’s very good of you, sir,” said Bawdsey, gratefully. “And you will try and persuade her to marry me?”

“Yes. She knows—as I told her—that, register or no register, my grandfather intends to recognize me as his heir. Therefore she is certain—as she may well be—that I shall marry Miss Ward. She will gradually get over her fancy for me and will be quite content to take you.”

Bawdsey sighed. “I hope so. I love that woman, sir.”

“Yet she is a violent woman—almost as violent as your first wife.”

**"Yes," assented Bawdsey, rather dolefully, "it seems as though I was always to fall into the hands of violent women. What do you intend to do now, sir?"**

**"Leave matters alone, Bawdsey. I don't want to learn who killed Mrs Jersey. Now I know about my father's marriage I shall change my name, take my rightful one, and have done with all this crime and mystery. The Yellow Holly can go hang, for me."**

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE TURNING OF THE LANE

**T**HE proverb says that "Good luck comes to those who know how to wait." It had certainly come to George Brendon, or, as he was now called, George Vane. Lord Derrington could not make enough of him. After the interview with Bawdsey the young man called at St Giles Square and related to his grandfather all he had learned. The old man was much astonished.

"I don't think Ireland was to blame," he said, "not even in holding his tongue. After all, the thing was an accident, although undoubtedly that woman was the cause. Have you seen Ireland?"

"Not yet, but I will soon."

"Then tell him from me that I don't consider he was responsible, and that I quite believe from what I know of Mrs Jersey that he has told the entire truth."

"I will, sir," answered George. "I suppose you mean that if he really committed the crime with malice aforethought Mrs Jersey would have blackmailed him."

Lord Derrington nodded approvingly. "You are what the Scotch call 'quick in the uptake,' George. That is what I mean. Mrs Jersey must have been afraid for herself or she would never have kept her claws off Ireland's money. She had plenty of mine," added the old gentleman, grimly. "Bad lot, George!"

"I quite agree with you, sir. Poor Bawdsey was honest, however."

"Well—" Lord Derrington did not assent immediately to this—"if Bawdsey had been really honest he would have asked me to be silent on the matter, and need not have used threats, however unwilling he was to carry them out. No, George, Bawdsey is like the serpent in the bamboo, straight so long as it is kept in check. I suppose he will marry the girl?"

"I think so. He is madly in love with her. I promised that you would give him a thousand pounds if he went to America."

"The deuce you did!" said Derrington, wrathfully.

"Why not, sir?" rejoined Brendon, calmly. "We want him out of our lives. He knows too much. Better send him abroad, so that he may not make any remark about this unpleasant family history."

Lord Derrington winced. George certainly had rather an unpleasant way of putting things. However, the old man silently acknowledged the justice of the speech. "You are right," he said. "But Bawdsey ought to do something for his money."

"You mean that he ought to discover the assassin?"

"Yes, I do. Whosoever killed that woman should be brought to justice, George."

Brendon looked down. "I think it will be best to let sleeping dogs lie, sir," he said significantly.

"Because of some scandal," said Derrington, looking hard at him. "Are you alluding to the possibility of Mrs Ward having killed her?"

At this supposition George laughed right out. "No, sir. I don't think Mrs Ward would go so far as that."

"She would, were there no law to restrain her."

"I dare say. She has the instincts of a female

despot. But as there is a law she would not jeopardize her neck. No, I mean Ireland."

Derrington sat up. "Nonsense! Do you mean to say he is guilty?"

"I don't think so, but Bawdsey has an idea," and George related the theory of the detective. Derrington grunted in a disgusted manner.

"The man's a born idiot," he said. "Why should Ireland run the risk of getting his neck into a noose for a second crime? If he thought that she would leave a confession behind inculcating him, he would have waited to make certain. I don't believe there is a word of truth in the matter. However, when you see him, you can question him about his doings on that night."

"I shall certainly do that," replied Brendon, quietly, "but failing Ireland (and his guilt is presumed by Bawdsey) there remains Margery."

"That idiot of a girl! Yes?"

George detailed his reasons for believing in Margery's guilt. Again Derrington sniffed. "It's all supposition. If the girl came into the room, if the stiletto were on the table, if Mrs Jersey scolded her into a fury. Pah! I don't believe it."

"And you really wish to find the assassin?"

"I should like to know, out of mere curiosity. But if it is your opinion that things should be left as they are, why, Bawdsey can take his thousand pounds and sail for America whenever he chooses. But I grudge setting the rascal up in business," added Derrington, who was still sore about the way in which he had been threatened.

After this conversation George took his leave. Dorothy was out of town, so he could not visit her. After the interview with Ireland in Derrington's library, Mrs Ward had found it convenient to go down the country. She felt that she was in an un-

pleasant position. Not that there was any danger of her being accused of murdering Vane. But if the police got hold of the story they might make inquiries—in fact, they certainly would make inquiries—and then the disagreeable fact would come out that Miss Bull was her sister. Mrs Ward knew that she had not behaved well to Jenny, and that if the truth were known her friends would blame her. As Mrs Ward did not like blame, and disliked to have her actions criticised, she went down the country, saying to Dorothy she desired a change of air. Lord Derrington wrote a note to Mrs Ward after George had departed.

“I’ll ask her to come up,” said Derrington, grimly, as he sealed the letter. “George will return in three days with the copy of the marriage certificate and with news of how that case has been disposed of. Mrs Ward shall apologize to him and formally consent to the marriage. Dorothy shall come also. And Walter”—Derrington rubbed his hands, chuckling. He was rather anxious to see Walter’s face when he heard that he was no longer the heir.

Meantime George went with Kowlaski and Bawdsey to Chelmsford to see after Lola. Kowlaski was in despair, as if Lola received a term of imprisonment his ballet would be brought to an untimely end. Now that Lola was out of the bill, the hall was not so full as usual, and Kowlaski foresaw that if Lola did not come back he would lose money. He therefore went down prepared to spend a large sum to set her free.

But there was no need for fear. Lola was brought up before the magistrates, and evidence was given as to her excitable nature. The old sexton produced the torn register and detailed how he had been assaulted. He thought the lady was queer, *himself*. Kowlaski went into the box, also Bawdsey

and George. The result of their evidence as to Lola's foreign ways was that the magistrate admonished her and inflicted a small fine. This was triumphantly paid by Kowlaski, who returned to town with his principal dancer under his jealous eye.

More than that, Kowlaski made quite a story out of the events. It was known in London that Lola Velez had been arrested, as all the London papers copied the account of the trial which had appeared in the country press. Kowlaski put it about that Lola had gone off her head owing to grief for her dying mother. Few people believed this, but the public was so pleased to see the favorite again that she was saluted with cheers. In a few days every one forgot about the matter, which, after all, did not amount to much.

Luckily it was not stated why Lola had wished to destroy the register. There were several marriage entries on the page, and no one could say which of these she wished obliterated. Besides, Brendon got the magistrate to suppress the book, and not let the press report the matter. He accomplished this by telling the magistrate exactly how the matter stood. So the judicial authority used his power, and the fourth estate quailed. Everything was settled in a most satisfactory manner.

Later on Brendon had copies made of the marriage entry of Percy Vane, Bachelor, and Rosina Lockwood, Spinster, and brought them to his grandfather. The old man read them carefully, then laid down the paper with a sigh of relief.

"I never thought I would be pleased to see that in black and white," he said.

"And are you pleased now?"

"Of course I am. You are to revive the glories of the Derrington Vane family. They have faded of late, but you, sir—" He clapped his grandson



on the back, and George laughed at the old man's enthusiasm.

"There is one strange thing," he said after a pause. "Seeing that my parents were married so near London I cannot understand how the marriage was not discovered before."

Derrington looked thoughtful also. "It is strange," he admitted, "but you remember the tale of Poe's Purloined Letter. People always look in the most unlikely places first, and because the church was so near to town and nobody had replied to the advertisement, they—the searchers, I mean—must have thought that the marriage took place in some moorland parish where people never looked at the journals. It was the very closeness of Wargrove church to London, George, that prevented the certificate being discovered sooner."

"I suppose you are right," said Brendon, "but it does seem strange."

"Everything in life is strange," said Derrington, "and not the least strange thing is that I kick out Walter to make room for you. By the way, George, he will be here soon."

"Have you told him?"

"Yes, and he wants to see you about the matter. I said that he could in my presence. What he has to say I don't know. There is another reason for your remaining, George. Mrs Ward and her daughter are coming here."

"She won't be pleased to see me," said Brendon.

"Oh, I think she will. After Ireland put her in a corner she grew afraid, and now she would like to see the matter settled at any price. When she is your mother-in-law, George, keep her out of your house or there will be trouble."

"You must stand sentinel, sir. She won't come near me then."

"Egad, that's true. She is afraid of me. I hold that stiletto, you see, and I know about her doings at San Remo. The minx!" said Derrington with great vigor. "I wonder that her daughter is so charming."

"So good, you mean," said George, fondly, whereat Derrington gave a sigh.

"Oh, love—love, and again—love," said he. "It seems I am going to have a most sentimental time with you two."

"Be at rest, sir. Neither Dorothy nor I am sentimental. We are too serious for that."

"That's worse. I hate serious lovers."

"Then we will be gay," said George, with a laugh.

"Don't overdo it," replied Derrington, with a kindly smile; "be as you are, both of you, and I shall not complain. Ah, here is Walter! Well, my boy, have you come to see your new cousin?"

Walter Vane entered the library with an injured air. He looked neater and more fragile than ever, and wonderfully old, considering his years. Derrington looked from him to the fine figure of George, with a queer look in his eyes. "No one would ever take you for relatives," he said.

"Why, they say we are like one another," said Walter. "Mrs Ward remarked on the likeness when we dined with her. I wondered why we should resemble one another, but it is explained now," and Walter cast a not unkindly look in his cousin's direction.

Derrington snarled. "George is like me, and you take after your father, Walter, who was a shrimp if ever there was one."

George hastened to the rescue of his cousin. "It seems to me that the conversation is getting somewhat personal," he remarked. "Walter, I hope you bear me no grudge for stepping into your shoes."

Walter took the hand in his own limp grasp. "Well, of course, it is hard on a fellow," he answered in a rather whining manner, "but you and I got on well together, so I would rather it was you than another fellow. That Train friend of yours, for instance. He's such a cad!"

"But a very good fellow for all that," said Brendon, dryly.

"Oh, people always say that of a fellow who has nothing to recommend him," retorted Walter; "but as you are to be the head of the family I am glad you are not a bounder."

"That's very kind of you," said George, dryly.

"And very silly of Walter," growled the grandfather. "What do you mean, sir, by talking rubbish? Is it likely that any one of my blood would be what you call a bounder?"

"No," said Walter, pacifying the old man. "I only mean——"

"Never mind what you mean. It's sure to be something foolish. This," said Derrington, pointing with his cane to George, "is the future head of our family. Pay him all respect."

"We'll get on capitally," said George, clapping Walter on the back.

"And what about my income?" asked Walter.

"You will have what you have now," said Derrington; "don't bother me about the matter. You and George can settle it between you."

Considering how he had been ousted, Walter really took things very calmly. But he had not enough vigor to protest. He sighed. His grandfather had cowed him, and Walter profoundly admired his newly found cousin, who did not hesitate to stand up to the despot. He began to think it was a good thing that George had come into the family. He would *at least* save him—Walter—from constant bullying.

This interesting family council was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs Ward, as pert and pretty as ever. She had quite recovered her spirits, and knowing that Derrington would say nothing about the card-cheating or about the San Remo matter, she was prepared to be as insolent as she dared. But she was quite determined not to cross swords again with the old man. Like a burnt child she dreaded the fire. Derrington was altogether too much, even for her.

As it was, she came sailing in with the prettiest air in the world, and held out both hands, her head on one side like a sick canary. "My dear Lord Derrington, how well you are looking! How"—here her astonished eyes fell on George. "You!" said Mrs Ward, aghast. "Mr Brendon! and here!"

"Not Mr Brendon," said Derrington, enjoying her confusion, "but my grandson, George Vane."

Dorothy, who had remained below to give some instructions to the footman, entered the room just in time to hear this announcement. She flew to her lover. "My dearest George, I am glad, glad, so glad," and before them all she kissed him. Mrs Ward screamed:

"Dorothy! What manners!"

"Very good manners," said Derrington, coolly, "seeing that they are natural. Well, Mrs Ward, George—my grandson, and heir," added the old man with emphasis, "has something to say to you."

"Really. I shall be most happy to hear it."

George took his cue. "I have to ask you for the hand of your daughter Dorothy," he said, looking very proud and manly as he stood with the girl's hand within his own.

"Really," said Mrs Ward again, "I don't know. I fancied that Walter, you see—" And she cast her eyes on the neat little man.

"Oh, I scratch," said Walter, in his elegant way. "There's no fighting against George. He has all the luck."

"You call him George?"

"Why shouldn't I? He's my cousin; the head of the house——"

"When I go to my long home," finished Derrington. "Well, Mrs Ward, do you consent to the match?"

"Do, mother," said Dorothy, imploringly.

Mrs Ward sank into a chair and pretended to be overcome by emotion. In fact, she did this merely to gain time, as she did not wish to answer too quickly. It was plain that Walter, whom she had wished Dorothy to marry, took, in her own phraseology, "a back seat." George was promoted *vice* Walter resigned. George would be Lord Derrington and would have the money. He was an obstinate man, certainly, and would be difficult to manage. Still, she might be able to get the better of him. She could always work him through Dorothy, if Dorothy would only get over her absurd notions of religion and all that sort of thing. On the whole Mrs Ward thought it was best to agree. Knowing what Derrington knew, and how obstinate both lovers were, she did not see very well what else she could do. However, she made the most of her compulsory surrender. After a few sighs, and having squeezed a few tears, she cried to her daughter, in a muffled voice, expressive of deep emotion, "Dorothy, my dear child."

Dorothy, with a look at George, went and knelt down by her mother's chair. She was not the dupe of this play-acting, but, knowing that her mother would insist on making an effective scene, wished to get it over as speedily as possible.

Mrs Ward put her hand on Dorothy's shoulder

in a maternal manner. "Do you love George?" she asked.

"Yes," said Dorothy, simply, "you know I love him."

"George, do you love my child?"

"I do," replied George, curtly, while Derrington surveyed this touching scene with a grim smile. He always loved to watch the antics of Mrs Ward. She believed in them so thoroughly herself, and they deceived no one gifted with ordinary intelligence.

"It is hard," said Mrs Ward with a deep sigh, "to see a child leave its parent. But you love her, you have won her;" here she rose, and raising Dorothy from her knees gave her to George. "Take her, George, and with her take a mother's blessing."

The idea of Mrs Ward's blessing was too much for Walter, and he went off into a shriek of laughter, which ended in his leaving the room. George was quite unmoved. He thanked Mrs Ward and kissed Dorothy. Then he took her to a distant seat near the window, where they could talk sensibly. Lord Derrington was left to console the afflicted mother. This he proceeded to do immediately.

"Egad, you did it well!" he said, looking at the pretty woman. "I don't believe Miss Terry or Mrs Siddons could have done it better."

Mrs Ward flushed a little, but still kept up the pose. "Nature spoke, my dear Lord Derrington. I am aware that you consider Nature vulgar."

"I was not aware that I did. I see so little of it, that your scene touched me—positively touched me."

Mrs Ward saw that it was useless to hide the truth from this keen-eyed old man any longer. "Oh, don't be nasty," she said plaintively, and

rustled up to him. "Of course, I wanted Dorothy to marry Walter, but George does just as well."

"I don't think she has made a bad exchange, Mrs Ward."

"He's good-looking enough," said the little woman, "but so serious and dull. Of course, I suppose you'll allow him an income."

"He shall have all that is necessary to keep up his position as my heir," said Derrington, dryly. "I hope he and Dorothy will live here. The house is big enough."

"And they won't have to pay any rent, which is always a consideration, isn't it? Oh, I hope dear Dorothy will be happy. I shall see much of her—much of my darling child."

"No," said Derrington, thinking it just as well to nip these plans in the bud, "you care very little about Dorothy, and you don't like George. When they are married you must stop away as much as is consistent with your feelings."

"I'll do what I like," said Mrs Ward, beginning to tap her foot.

"No, I don't think you will. You threatened me in this room."

"I was only playing a game," protested Mrs Ward.

"Well, I can play a game also. Mrs Jersey has left behind her a confession in which she details how you managed to cheat your sister, Miss Bull. If you don't leave that couple severely alone I shall show the confession to Dorothy."

"You would never be so cruel."

"Oh, yes, I would," replied Derrington, who had not the slightest intention of fulfilling his threat.

"I never did anything to my sister. Mrs Jersey tells lies——"

Derrington made a gesture of disgust. "There—

there," he said, "what is the use of talking further? Things are settled. When Dorothy and George are married I'll see what I can do for you."

Mrs Ward's face became wreathed with smiles. She was such a frivolous, heartless little woman that she could change from one mood to another with wonderful rapidity. "Oh, thank you, dear Lord Derrington," she said artlessly, and pressing his arm. "I know you are the most generous of men. But I really can't stop talking here all day." She rustled over to Dorothy. "My darling, I must go and do some shopping. No, you can stay here. I will call again in an hour. George," she presented her cheek, "you can kiss your mother-in-law."

George did so, delicately, so as not to spoil the tint of the cheek.

Mrs Ward departed. "He's like a block of wood," she said to herself; "never did a man kiss me so coldly before. Ugh! The bear!"



## CHAPTER XXIV

### A STARTLING SURPRISE

**H**AVING thus settled matters in a satisfactory manner with Mrs Ward and Dorothy, George sought out Ireland the next day. He passed a delicious hour with Dorothy, and they renewed the vows they had made when there was little chance of a bright future. Now the future was altogether bright, and the two built castles in the air. George was to marry Dorothy, they were to take up their residence with Lord Derrington, and George was to enter Parliament on the first opportunity.

"But you must not neglect your literary work," said Dorothy; "the novel must be finished."

"I hope that many novels will be finished," said George, laughing. "I will be like Beaconsfield, and write novels between whiles of politics—it will be an amusement."

"Which will be the amusement?" asked Dorothy.

"Both. Politics is an amusing game, and when one has time to write what one pleases, and at the pace one pleases, that is amusing also. You will be my inspiration—my Egeria."

"That is very like Beaconsfield," replied Miss Ward; "he always called some unknown woman his Egeria."

"I am more lucky. I know who my Egeria is."

More talk of this light and fanciful kind passed. It would have sounded foolish to sensible people, but George and his beloved were so happy that they

talked nonsense out of sheer lightness of heart. At the end of the hour Mrs Ward carried off Dorothy, and George took leave of his grandfather.

It was the next day that he went to see Ireland. At the door he was informed that Ireland had been very ill with his heart, and that the doctor had been called in. Nevertheless, Ireland would not obey the advice of his physician and stop in bed. He was up and dressed as usual and in his study.

George entered the large bare room, papered with the gaudy advertisements, and saw his former guardian seated at his desk as usual. The man looked very ill. His large, placid face was extremely pale, there were dark circles under his eyes, and he even seemed to have grown lean. His clothes hung loosely on him, and he did not rise when George entered. The young man knew that Ireland must be ill to fail in this courtesy, as he was extremely punctilious.

"Excuse me, George," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "but I am not so well as I might be."

"You are looking ill—very ill," said George, taking his seat.

Ireland nodded. "I can't live long," he remarked in his heavy voice. "So the doctor informs me. My heart is extremely weak. I may die at any moment."

George was shocked. "It's not so bad as that, I hope," he said.

"It's as bad as it well can be. For the last few days I have deviated sadly from my usual habits. I have not taken a walk, and my system of life is quite upset. It's the beginning of the end." He paused and sighed. "You are looking well, George."

"I have every reason to. Mrs Ward has consented to my marriage."

"With her daughter? How is that?"

"Well, the church where my parents were married has been discovered."

Ireland looked interested. "That is good news. Where were they married?"

"In Wargrove Church. It is a parish in Essex, an hour's journey from town. Quite a small place."

Ireland made the same remark that George himself had made. "Strange," he said, "that being so near town the place was not discovered before. I have no doubt that your advertisement set many people hunting. Well, I'm glad that the marriage has been proved at last, both for your sake and in justice to the woman I loved—to her dear memory. She was Rosina Vane after all."

"That has been proved beyond a doubt. My grandfather has seen the copy of the certificate and now holds it."

"Is he pleased?"

"Very pleased. He is now as friendly toward me as he has been hitherto hostile."

Ireland nodded, breathing heavily. "I thought he would be. He and I had a long talk about you on the day I called. That was when I saw Mrs Ward and——"

"You can go on," said George, seeing his hesitation. "I know the whole story."

"What story?" asked Ireland, suspiciously.

"The story of what happened at San Remo. Mrs Ward I know was Violet Howard, and her sister Jenny is Miss Bull."

"Yes. Poor Jenny, she was the better of the two, and now she drags out a miserable life in a London lodging-house. While Violet, who is a bad woman——"

"And the mother of Dorothy," interrupted George, imperiously. "Say no more, sir."

"You are quite right. As I can't say good of the

woman let me say no bad. Well, you know how she loved your father."

"I think she flirted with him, but it was Jenny who really loved."

"And look at her reward!" said Ireland, with a deep sigh. "Those who try to do their best always come off worst. I loved your mother, George, and I have been a lonely man all my life."

It was a sad case. George wished to get at the truth, but he was so sorry for Ireland, who had passed so many miserable years, that he did not like to inflict more pain. Nevertheless, it was necessary to learn if Ireland had really visited Mrs Jersey on that night, so as to set Bawdsey's mind at rest. If George did not learn the truth, Bawdsey might attempt the discovery, and he would handle the old man in a much worse manner than George was likely to do. While pondering how he could set about his unpleasant task, George was saved from making the first step, always the most difficult, by an observation from Ireland, which paved the way to an explanation.

"How did you discover the church?" he asked idly.

"In rather a queer way. Lola Velez——"

Ireland opened his eyes, which had been closed, and looked up. "Who is Lola Velez?" he asked anxiously.

"She is a dancer whom I helped—oh, quite in a proper way, Mr Ireland. You know the name?"

Ireland, contrary to George's expectation, nodded. "There was a woman in San Remo about the time of your father's death. She was called Velez, and was in love with him."

"He seems to have been a fascinating man," said George, smiling, to set Ireland at his ease. "But this Lola is the daughter of the woman you mention. It was she who found the church."

By this time Ireland was quite awake, and keenly anxious for details. "How did she learn its name?" he demanded quickly.

"She found it in the confession of Mrs Jersey."

Ireland snapped the paper-cutter he was holding, and, leaning back in his chair, looked anxiously at George. "What do you mean?"

"Well," replied the young man, keeping his eyes fixed on Ireland's face, "it seems that Mrs Jersey left a confession behind her as to what took place at San Remo."

"Who has that confession?"

"I have! I got it from Lola!"

"And how did she manage to obtain it?"

For answer George related how Lola had called to see Mrs Jersey, and how she had managed to steal the confession. "It was from reading it," finished George, "that she learned of the church in which my parents were married. Desiring that I should marry her, and thinking I would not do as were my birth proved, she went to the church to destroy the registers. She was caught with the torn leaves, and arrested."

"Arrested?"

"Yes. I wonder you did not see the case reported in the papers."

"I have been too ill to read the papers lately," said Ireland, looking round the room in rather a helpless way, "and none of my servants told me. What happened?"

"Oh, Lola was let off with a small fine. She is now back dancing at her music-hall. She gave the confession to me."

"Did any one else see it—the authorities?"

"No. You can set your mind at rest, Mr Ireland. I got it from Lola before she was taken to prison. No one had seen it but myself and Lord Derrington,"

Ireland drew a long breath of relief. "You made a strange remark just now, George," he said, not looking at the young man. "You told me to set my mind at rest. Why did you say that?"

"I have read the confession," said George, quietly.

Mr Ireland rose from his chair and began to pace the room. He seemed so weak that George wished him to return, but the old man waved his hand impatiently. "It's all right—it's all right," he said, then stopped opposite to George. "Then you know?"

"I know that my father's death was due to an accident."

"What! Did that wretched woman tell the truth?"

"She told the truth."

"And she did not accuse me of having murdered your father?"

"No. She did not. I suppose she thought it was as well to go to her long home with as few sins as possible on her conscience. But she certainly exonerated you."

"Thank God for that," said Ireland, and returned to his seat. Then he looked at his visitor in a piteous manner. "George," he said in faltering tones, "I have suffered greatly on account of that most unhappy accident——"

"I am sure you must have, sir. But don't let it worry you any more. It was an accident, and both Lord Derrington and I heartily forgive you for having been the unconscious cause of my father's death."

Ireland nodded. "Thank God again," he said solemnly. "Your father and I were not very good friends, as I found it difficult to forgive him for having taken from me the woman I loved. But at San Remo we got on better together. I stifled my resentment so that I might see as much of you as possible, George. Knowing that I was not on good

terms with Vane, I thought that Mrs Jersey might have accused me of the crime. She did try to get money out of me."

"So Bawdsey told me."

"Bawdsey. Who is he?"

"I forget you don't know. He is a private-inquiry agent who has been looking after the case on behalf of Lord Derrington. I learn from the confession of Mrs Jersey that he is her husband."

"George Rates. I remember. She told me she married him and went to America. It was after her return from America that she tried to get money out of me. I refused; not that I did not realize the danger to which she could expose me, but I knew that if I once yielded I would be in her power. Besides, I had a defense, as she got the stiletto from the woman Velez."

"And it was with that same stiletto that Mrs Jersey was killed."

"By whom?" asked Ireland. "Did her husband——"

"No. We do not know who killed her. Perhaps you may know?"

"I!" Ireland looked genuinely surprised. "No; how should I know?"

"Well," said George, rather awkwardly, "it seems that Bawdsey has got it into his head that you knew about this confession."

"I did not!"

"That you were afraid it would be published after her death, and that you went to the house on that night to get it."

"I did not. How could I have entered the house?"

"Bawdsey thinks you had a latch-key."

"No. All the keys were handed to Lord Derrington's agent when the house was sold. In plain words, George, this man Bawdsey—Rates—whatever *he calls himself*, accuses me of the murder."

"He doesn't exactly accuse you, but——"

"I don't know what else you would call his statements but accusations," retorted Ireland with some heat, "but I never was near the house. I certainly thought that Mrs Jersey might leave some such confession, but I never asked her about it. I never thought that such a healthy woman would die before me, and I knew that sooner or later my bad heart would carry me off in spite of the regularity of my life."

"Then you cannot guess who killed her?"

"No. I was never near the house. I was in bed and asleep. My servants will tell you so."

"I need not ask them," said George, quickly. "I never thought you were guilty, and I only came to receive your assurance, so that I might tell Bawdsey and prevent him troubling you."

"If Bawdsey comes here I'll soon make short work of him," said Ireland, sharply. "I am not afraid."

"You need not be. Mrs Jersey's own confession exonerates you."

"I don't mind even that. I would have faced the worst had it to be faced. I never was a coward—except in one thing." He paused and looked timidly at George. "I shrank from telling you how I was the unhappy cause of your father's death."

"You were not the cause, in my opinion. Mrs Jersey was the cause."

"Well, I thought you would shrink from me did you know all."

"I do know all, and I do not shrink from you," replied George, leaning across the desk to shake Ireland's hand. "It was a pure accident, and has been related by your enemy."

"I am so glad the truth is known to you at last," faltered the old man, "and that you see ~~how~~ ~~was~~



consciously I caused the death. You are her son, George, the son of the only woman I ever loved—of the woman for whose sake I have remained lonely all these years. Had you condemned me——” His emotion prevented him from saying more.

George grew alarmed by his pallor. “Please think no more of the matter, Mr Ireland,” he said; “you are ill. Go and lie down!”

“Yes, I’ll lie down.” Ireland leaned heavily on George’s arm. “I shall lie down for ever. But I am glad you know. I am glad you are not angered.”

“We are the best of friends, Mr Ireland. You have always been kind to me. And I am sure my dead mother blesses you for all your goodness to her orphan boy.”

“Rosina! Rosina!” murmured Ireland, “how I loved her. You have her eyes, George, and her kind nature. Come, let me get to bed. Soon the curtain will drop.”

“I am afraid my visit has been too much for you.”

“No. I am glad you came. I am glad you spoke out. I always intended to do so, but I feared lest you should blame me.”

By this time they were ascending the stairs. George conducted the old man to his room and sent for the doctor. Ireland undressed and got to bed. Then he insisted on George leaving him.

“But you are ill,” protested the young man.

“I am dying, but what of that? I am glad to die. I shall meet Rosina again after long, long years of sorrow. Go, George. We understand one another, and you have forgiven me. There is no more to be said.”

“There is nothing to forgive,” replied George, softly; then, to humor his old guardian, he departed. A strong grip of the hand was exchanged

between them. George left the room and saw Ireland lying as still as any corpse. Only his lips moved, and they murmured continuously, "Rosina! Rosina!" He was true to the woman he loved to the very end.

George left the house, as there was nothing he could do, but he intended to call in again. Meanwhile he repaired to Amelia Square to see Bawdsey. Derrington wished him to tell the detective to stop looking after the case and discharge him from his employment. In his pocket George had a check for one thousand pounds, and when this was paid the whole case was to be relegated to obscurity. Now that Derrington was reconciled to his grandson he was anxious, for obvious reasons, that the sordid tragedy of Mrs Jersey's death should not come to light. He had not played a very respectable part in it himself, and, moreover, he did not wish that confession published. It would only be a case of washing the family linen in public, and both George and he agreed that this was undesirable. The sooner Bawdsey married Lola and went to America the better, Derrington thought. And for his own sake Bawdsey would hold his tongue, seeing what a close connection he was of the dead woman.

Bawdsey was at home and saw George at once. He looked rather excited, and could hardly keep his seat. "Well, Mr Brendon," he asked, "what is it?"

"I should rather ask you that," said George; "you seem excited."

"Not very. Only I have been fortunate in some business, and—"

"What is the business?"

"I'll tell you that later. What is yours?"

"A pleasant one," rejoined George. "Here is the check for one thousand pounds which my grandfather promised you. Marry Lola and go to the

States, and stop searching for the assassin of Mrs Jersey."

"Thank you," replied Bawdsey, taking the check eagerly, "your grandfather is a prince, Mr Brendon. As to the case, why should I stop searching?"

"You will never find the assassin."

"Pardon me," said Bawdsey, in high glee. "I have found the assassin. Yes!" as George uttered an ejaculation. "Miss Bull killed Mrs Jersey."

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE TRUTH

**G**EORGE stared at the triumphant detective in surprise. It seemed impossible that what he stated could be true. Miss Bull was the very last person whom Brendon would have accused. No one had been more candid than she had been, and no one at the time of the discovery of the crime had done more to help the detectives.

"You must mean Margery," said George after a time.

"No, I don't," replied Bawdsey, in a determined voice. "I mean that little white old woman with the black eyes—Miss Bull, or, as you know her, Miss Jenny Howard."

"But what reason——"

"Ah, that's a long story! She shall tell you herself."

"Have you had her arrested?"

"Not yet. But she will be arrested before the end of the day. I have already communicated with Scotland Yard."

George rose and walked to the window. He felt irritable and upset now that the truth had come to light. He wished that Bawdsey had not been so confoundedly interfering, and the detective's next words annoyed him still further.

"It was your idea about Margery that put me on the scent," he said with great complacency; "though, to be sure, I had my suspicions before. It was to watch Miss Bull that I came here."

"What made you think that she was guilty?"

"She has confessed—in the calmest manner, too—that—"

"I mean before. Why did you suspect her?"

"Well, it seemed to me that she was the only person who could have killed Eliza. She and Eliza hated one another because of their mutual love for your father."

George groaned. What a lot of trouble his father had caused with his handsome looks and charming manners. Even after his death the fatal attraction he exercised seemed to bring about disaster. "She did not kill Mrs Jersey on that account," he said.

"Wait till you hear. She will tell you. In fact, she asked me to send for you, as she wishes to speak."

"Where is she now?"

"In the famous sitting-room playing Patience."

"Doesn't she realize the peril of her position?"

"In a way she does. But she seems quite ready to face the worst."

"Poor woman," said George, thinking of the sad life which the old maid had led; "if she has sinned, she has suffered."

"If people will use knives in that way they must be punished," was the rather harsh retort of Bawdsey.

"Don't talk stuff, Bawdsey. You have your own sins to think of."

"I never committed murder."

"No one said you had, but you may do so before you die."

Bawdsey shuddered. "I hope not, Mr Vane," he said. "I don't know why you should say such a thing. I am an honest man."

"You say that so often that I shall begin to disbelieve it," replied Brendon, rather cynically; "but

if you marry Lola, either you will kill her or she will kill you."

"I'll take my chance of that. And if you——"

George made an impatient gesture with his hand and returned to his seat. "Never mind further chatter. Let me hear how you came to learn that this poor creature struck the blow."

"If you talk that way of a criminal, Mr Vane, what will you say of a good woman?"

"My good man, there is more joy over a sinner that repenteth——"

"But Miss Bull doesn't repent," said Bawdsey.

"I'll hear the story before I give an opinion on that point. You say that it was some remark I made which——"

"Yes, it was," said Bawdsey, eagerly, and throwing himself into a seat. "Your remark that Margery might be guilty——"

"One moment," interrupted George, in his turn. "I may tell you that I have seen Mr Ireland, and he declares that he never was near the house on that night, that he knew nothing of the confession, and that he had no latch-key. He is innocent."

"Now that I have heard Miss Bull I know that, sir. She's the one."

"Well, and how did you find out?"

Bawdsey cleared his throat and began, with a most important air: "I rather agreed with your idea that Margery might be guilty," he said, "and when I turned it over in my own mind I thought it more and more probable. I therefore determined to get Margery alone and work on her fears."

"Pah!" said Brendon, with disgust.

"Well, sir," retorted Bawdsey, shrugging his shoulders. "I had to get at the truth somehow, and detective's work is not all so honorable as novelists make out. I got Margery alone."

"And how did you set to work?"

"Well, it was this morning in the sitting-room. Miss Bull had gone out and had left Margery to make up some accounts. The girl was laboring away at them and getting into a hopeless mess. I came to speak with her, and offered to do them. I soon put the accounts to rights and then began to talk of Miss Bull."

"Why of Miss Bull?"

"Why—" Bawdsey pinched his lip—"I thought at the time that Margery was guilty, and that if in talking to her I laid the blame on Miss Bull that the girl would speak out."

"You traded on the poor wretch's friendship. Bawdsey, I'm ashamed of you."

"I'm ashamed of myself," replied the detective, penitently; "but Lord bless you! Mr Vane, one gets used to this sort of thing. In our business the means justifies the ends far more than in religion."

"I certainly don't think it justifies any end in religion," said George, sharply. "Well, you accused Miss Bull of the crime?"

"In a way I did. Margery denied it."

"What did you say?"

"That she might as well confess. I declared that I had evidence to prove Miss Bull's guilt, and that she would be arrested when she came back. I declare, Mr Vane, I thought that girl would strike me. She was like a wild-cat."

"I wish she had," growled George, whose generous spirit was revolted by the use Bawdsey had put Margery to.

"She said if I arrested Miss Bull she would kill me. I said, 'As you killed your aunt.' She up and said: 'Yes, I did kill her. Miss Bull is innocent, and you know she is.' Of course, when she admitted the fact I at once began to suspect Miss Bull."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because if Margery had been guilty she would not have owned up. But if Miss Bull was guilty, Margery would certainly take the guilt on herself."

"Poor girl!" murmured George; "there is something noble in that dull soul."

Bawdsey could not see this, and mentally disagreed with it. However, he did not want to argue down Brendon's too tender conscience, so he went on with his recital. "While Margery was threatening me and taking the guilt on herself, Miss Bull came in. That stupid girl ran to her and fell at her feet, crying that I knew all, but that she would die for her dear Miss Bull."

"And what did the woman say?"

"She asked me if I knew. I said I did. She demanded how I found out. I told her that that was my business. She began to smell a rat and suspected that I was bluffing. She would have held her tongue, but Margery was in such terror for her friend that she came out with the whole story. Miss Bull tried to stop her, but Margery kept repeating that she would die for her dear Miss Bull, and so let the cat out of the bag."

"The girl is half-witted—all this may not be true."

"Oh, yes, it is. When Miss Bull saw that the game was up she sat down and admitted that she had killed Mrs Jersey. She also said that she was glad the truth had come to light, that she wished to die, and so on."

"She was raving," said George, incredulously, not thinking any one would incriminate himself or herself so freely.

"No, she wasn't. She told me the whole story in the calmest manner, just as though she were asking me to have a cup of tea. Then she asked me to send for you and sat down to play Patience."



"I wonder you are not having her watched," said George, with scorn.

"Oh, she won't run away," replied Bawdsey, easily, and not perceiving the irony of the remark. "Come along, Mr Vane, we'll go down and see her. She is desperately anxious to see you."

"Do any of the boarders know?"

"Not yet, but they will when she is arrested."

George shuddered and followed Bawdsey down the stairs. It seemed terrible to him that such a fragile little creature as Miss Bull should be subjected to this disgrace. He did not condone her crime. She had acted wrongly and must take the consequences. But he could not forget that she was Dorothy's aunt, and he wished he could see some way of rescuing her from this dreadful position.

Miss Bull was—as Bawdsey had stated—playing Patience. Seated at the very table where her victim had sat, she dealt the cards, and seemed quite interested in the game. Margery was seated in a chair near at hand, looking with tearful eyes into the face of her friend. Beyond the fact that Miss Bull was whiter than usual, she showed no signs of emotion.

"You have come, George," she said, addressing him by his name. "I am glad to see you. Mr Bawdsey, you may go."

The detective was taken aback and would have remonstrated, but Margery rose and approached him. "You have done your worst," she said, her eyes flashing. "Go, or I'll twist your neck."

Bawdsey shrugged his shoulders, and with a glance at George went out. After all, he had heard the story before and did not particularly care to hear it again. Besides, Bawdsey was a kindly man, and he felt sorry that he had proceeded to such extremities.

Miss Bull shuffled her pack of cards and laid them

away in a box. "I shall play that game no more," she said. "I have been playing Patience all my life, but the end has come, and I am glad it has come. Hush, Margery," for the girl had burst into tears, "I will see that you are left well off and looked after, my dear."

"I don't want that. I want you," sobbed the girl. She slipped to the floor and laid her head on Miss Bull's knee like a faithful dog. Miss Bull patted her head and allowed her to remain in this position while she spoke to George. Margery sobbed for a time, and then remained quiet, listening to every word, and quite content to feel the gentle hand of the old maid smoothing her hair.

"I suppose you were astonished when Mr Bawdsey told you?" said Miss Bull, looking with piercing eyes at Brendon.

"I was. I never thought that you—you—"

"That I would kill Mrs Jersey," finished the woman, quietly. "Why not? She was a bad, wicked creature, and caused the death of your father. She boasted of it."

"Where? When?" asked the astonished young man.

"In this very room, in my presence. But to make you understand, I had better tell you all."

"One moment, Miss Bull. When you told the fortunes on that night, did you intend to kill Mrs. Jersey?"

"No. The death card did turn up. That was a strange coincidence, George. When I came down the stairs I had no more idea than you of killing the wretched woman."

"What made you do it?"

"I am telling you," replied Miss Bull, folding her hands on her lap. "Wait and hear. Mrs Jersey was very rude to me on that night. I intended to

remonstrate with her. She added insult to injury by locking Margery in her bedroom, so as to keep her from me. I heard her scolding Margery in the passage, and when all was quiet, and Mrs Jersey had gone down the stairs, I went up to Margery's room and unlocked the door. Mrs Jersey had struck the poor child, and she was sobbing on her bed. I then determined to go down for the second time and see Mrs Jersey."

"For the second time? Were you down before?"

"I was," replied Miss Bull, calmly. "I wondered who Mrs Jersey had coming to see her, particularly after she had lost her courage when she saw the yellow holly in your coat."

"You noticed that?"

"Yes, and I noticed the holly also. I wondered why you wore it. The sight of it put into my mind that fatal night when he—" Miss Bull brushed aside her thoughts—"but no matter. I thought I would see if Mrs Jersey was seeing any one, and also I wished to talk about the yellow holly."

"But why should you trouble about her seeing any one?"

Miss Bull looked down, and then looked up abruptly. "Mrs Jersey would have sent me back to the asylum if she could, and I was always afraid lest she should see some one secretly about the matter. I crept down the stairs, leaving Margery in my room playing at Patience. Mrs Jersey's door was closed. I heard the murmur of voices and I put my ear to the keyhole. I heard that dancer—afterward I learned that it was the dancer—I heard her accuse Mrs Jersey of having killed Percy Vane."

"On what grounds did Lola base that accusation?"

"She said her mother told her."

"I remember," muttered George. "The mother,

on receiving back the stiletto, certainly might have thought so. And what did Mrs Jersey say?" he asked aloud.

"She denied it, and made some sort of excuse. I remained to hear no more. I knew then that Mrs Jersey had killed my Percy."

"But she did not; it was an accident."

"I know. She explained. But she was the cause. I was right to kill her. But for her Percy would have been alive, I would have been his wife, and you, George, would have been my step-son."

"What did you do next?"

"I went up to my room and resumed my game of Patience. I intended to have a talk with Mrs Jersey the next morning, but when I found that she had struck Margery I came down at once——"

"That was after eleven?"

"About a quarter past. Mrs Jersey was in her room. We talked, and I told her what I had heard. She denied it. I pointed to the stiletto which was on the table as a proof that the girl had been here. Mrs Jersey said that it was the same stiletto with which Percy had been killed, as Lola had received it from her mother. That put the thought into my head that God intended Mrs Jersey should be slain with the same weapon with which my darling had been stabbed."

"A terrible thought. You should have put it away."

"I did, but it came again. I accused Mrs Jersey of having killed Percy. She gloried in the fact that it was through her he had died. She declared that if Ireland had not held her hand she would have laid him dead at her feet. She exulted that the accident had fulfilled her intention, and taunted me with the fact that I never became his wife. I was very quiet," added Miss Bull, her eyes glittering.

“but my blood was boiling. Mrs Jersey turned her back on me with an insolent laugh and sat down. The stiletto was on the table, her head was turned away. I softly took the dagger, and——”

“No! no!” cried Margery, wailing, “you never did it—you never did it, dear Miss Bull. It was I who——”

“Don’t be a fool, child! I did it, and I would do it again.” Miss Bull rose. “George, you now know all, go—no, do not shake hands. I have avenged your father, and I expect I will be hanged.”

Margery burst out into renewed weeping, and Miss Bull soothed her, talking to George the while. “Tell my sister,” she said, “that the name of Howard will not be mentioned. I will die under my false name. No disgrace will be brought on her. As to Dorothy——” here Miss Bull’s eyes grew tender—“no disgrace will befall her. Marry her, George, love her, make her a good husband, and—take this kiss to her from a sorely tried woman.”

Before the astonished George knew what she was about, he felt a pair of cold lips pressed to his own. The next moment she had pushed him out of the room and had locked the door. That was the last George saw of her.

Whether Margery had agreed to die with her, or whether Miss Bull, knowing what a miserable life the girl would lead after her death, compelled her to take the poison, it will never be known. But when the door was burst open the two women were found on the floor in one another’s arms. On the table was an empty glass, and it was ascertained that Miss Bull and Margery had taken prussic acid. Bawdsey entered the room an hour after the death, alarmed by the silence. He found that his prey had escaped. Miss Bull was buried under her false name, and Margery was buried with her. Nothing of Miss

Bull's sad past or of her killing of Mrs Jersey came to light. She passed away with her only friend, and her story was told.

Six months later George Vane was seated in the library of the mansion in St Giles Square. It was after dinner, and Lord Derrington occupied his usual chair. The old man looked brighter and happier than he had looked for many years. Daily George grew a greater favorite with him, and on the morrow George was to be married. Lord Derrington had insisted that as it was his last night as a bachelor George should dine alone with him, and would not admit even Walter. "It's the last time I'll have you all to myself, George," said the old man, piteously; "after to-morrow Dorothy will possess you."

"Not at all," replied George, "you will have us both. We will come back from the honeymoon in a month, and then we will live here."

"That's all been arranged," said Derrington, testily, "but we won't be two independent bachelors."

"All the better," replied his grandson, cheerily; "a lady in the house will make a lot of difference. You won't know this place when Dorothy is flitting about."

"Don't! Her mother is the kind of woman who flits, and I won't have her doing the butterfly business in that way."

"Oh, I don't think we'll be troubled much with Mrs Ward. Since the shock inflicted by her sister's sad death she has become religious."

"Bah! That's only a phrase. Poor Miss Bull," said Derrington. "I like to think of her under that name. She had a sad life. I don't wonder she killed herself. Do you think she was mad, George?"

"No. But I think the memory of her wrongs,

which were all caused by Mrs Jersey, was too much for her. She was mad for the moment, but she told me the terrible story in the calmest manner."

"And who came in at the front door that night?" asked Derrington.

"No one. After the murder Miss Bull opened it to fly—panic-struck, I expect—but Margery came downstairs and stopped her. Miss Bull closed the door and remained to face the worst."

"Well, she is dead and buried, and the scandal is laid at rest. Unless that Bawdsey revives it."

"Oh, you can trust Bawdsey," said George, smiling; "he and Lola are quite happy, and she has almost forgotten me. I got a letter from Bawdsey the other day. He is acting as his wife's agent, and they are making a lot of money."

"All the better. He won't talk about that business. By the way, I forgot to ask you about Ireland's money?"

"The money he left to me? I have settled that on Dorothy. How suddenly he died," said George, reflectively; "just an hour after I left the house. I hope his end was peace. I think it was, as he felt relieved that you and I had forgiven him."

"There was nothing to forgive. It was an accident, and if any blame is due it is to that Jersey woman."

"Well, she is dead, and the woman who killed her is dead, so let them all rest in peace. But it was good of Ireland leaving me his money."

"I don't see who else he had to leave it to. And five thousand a year is not to be despised. Have you settled it all on Dorothy?"

"Every penny. Don't you approve?"

"Oh, yes, so long as Mrs Ward doesn't get it."

"She's a reformed character. Why, the other day *she told me that she considered Dorothy irreligious.*"

“Pah! New brooms. She’ll soon grow weary of that pose. When the effect of poor Jenny Howard’s death wears off she will be as gay and silly as before. Don’t have her in this house, that’s all.”

“You can depend upon that, sir. But Dorothy will be here—Dorothy, whom I shall see to-morrow crowned with orange-blossoms, and——”

Derrington laughed, but not unkindly. “Well, well. Better orange-blossoms than yellow holly.”

George nodded. “I hope never to see yellow holly again,” he said, and Derrington agreed. So their conversation ended on the threshold of George’s new life with that last reference to the old.



THE END





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